

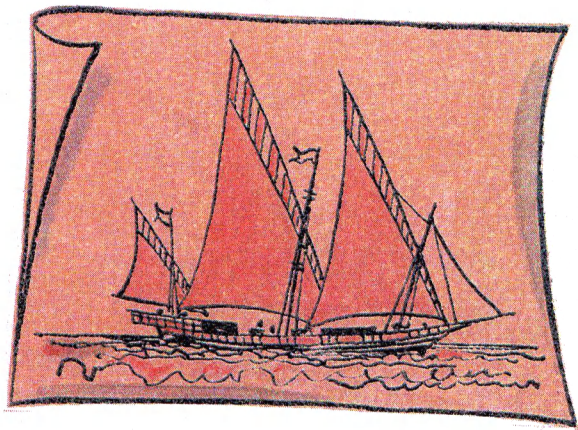
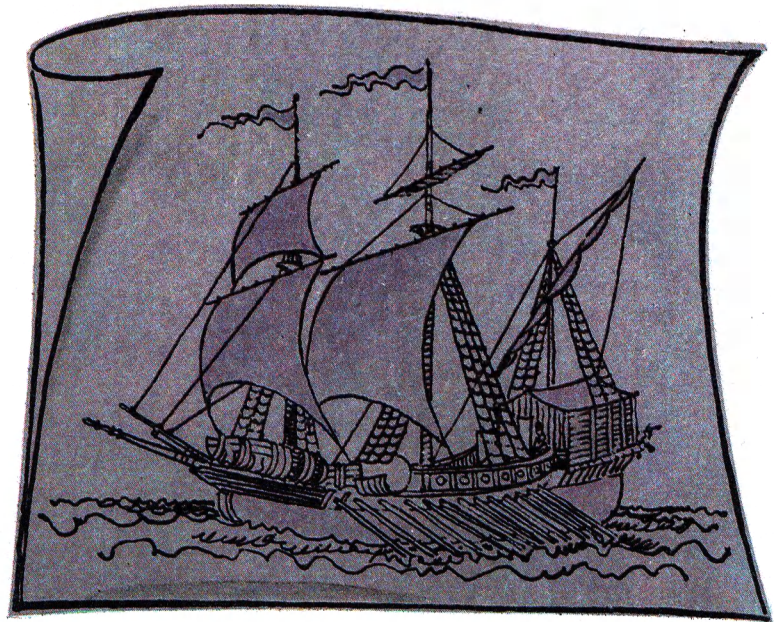
**ALBERT
IVANOV**

THE EVERYDAY ADVENTURES OF MISHA YENOKHIN



RADUGA PUBLISHERS





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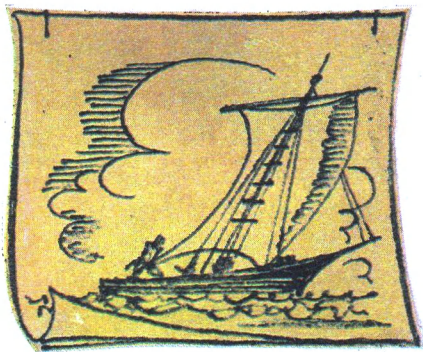
THE EVERYDAY ADVENTURES OF MISHA YENOKHIN



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Contents

PART I. The Way Is Clear	
“They’ll be sorry tomorrow!”	5
“I was relying on you...”	11
“Saitotal”	16
“We’re not sailing anywhere!”	21
“Psychological warfare”	24
“Nitroglycerine”	26
“The way is clear”	28
PART II. Hold Her Steady!	
“Two cables away from here”	32
“Terrible revenge”	37
The Pioneer Patrol	38
“They’re crackers”	42
“Write that word down...”	45
PART III. “Copy Me!”	
“They’re strong and tough”	48
Learning to use a compass	53
Under the boat	58
A sailing lesson: “Copy me!”	62
“I would never have agreed if...”	67
Borka’s unsporting dreams	69
A training session: “How to weather a storm”	74
Help! A Tiger!	80
Captivity	82
PART IV. “I Hasten to Your Call”	
“Catch that cat!”	84
More of Borka’s unsporting dreams	91
“Bought with the cat’s money”	94
The new “sports” test	97
A sailing lesson: “Wind direction”	101
“The suppliers”	102
Another sailing lesson: “Navigation”	105
“Full speed ahead”	108
Mum Trap talks	111
Treachery	114



Part I

THE WAY IS CLEAR

“They’ll be sorry tomorrow!”

This June Zhenka had his ninth birthday, but for almost two weeks now he had been about the unhappiest person in the world. Yet he was so lucky. He lived on the Black Sea. All the boys in the Soviet Union probably envied him for that. And his father was a captain in the Merchant Navy. All the boys in Zhenka’s town envied him for that. And his best friends were the Moshkins, twin brothers alike as two peas, who always spoke in unison. All the boys in Zhenka’s street envied him for that. And Zhenka was a handsome lad too. When he looked in the mirror he saw the spitting image of the famous Civil War hero Kotovsky, only as a boy, without the moustache and with a bit more hair! But then the trouble started.

Before Zhenka moved up to the third form, everything had been fine. He had played in the yard with the Moshkin twins, and no one had touched him.

But the street is not the same as the yard. The street has its own laws. And they were made by beefy Borka from the fifth form and his “gang”, the fourth-formers Vitka Mum Trap and Slavka Giggle Guts. They had got those nicknames because Vitka never said a word, and Slavka giggled all the time.

In the last year Zhenka had shot up by half a head. Seeing that he had grown taller, Borka and his pals began pestering him. They made life a misery for all the younger kids in the street, not just him, of course, but that was small consolation. At any moment the gang might suddenly for no reason at all give you a painful flick on the head; or pull a girl’s plait if she had one; or take away your glass of fizzy right by the machine; or knock an ice-cream out of your hand into the dust or make you stand in a long queue to get cinema tickets—for them. They were bored, and this was their way of amusing themselves. Fortunately they sometimes played dominoes for hours on end, like old-age pensioners, outside Mum Trap’s house, and left everyone alone. Unless

you happened to walk past them, of course. And how could you help walking past them, when this was the shortest way down to the sea, and Mum Trap's house was the last in the street. It would take hours if you tried to make a detour, because there were hotels and holiday centres all around with high fences. And fierce old men on duty at the gates, who shouted, "Where do you think you're going? Don't you make no trouble here! This is a private beach. Off you go!" Who was making trouble! Borka and his pals by not letting them down to the sea. You would creep past, hardly daring to breathe, and they'd chuck rotten apples at you. Then you'd cry:

"No one's done anything to you!"

"Oh, yes, they have," they would shout angrily. "Look at you, walking past here! Who gave you permission?"

Zhenka's Aunt Klava, his mother's sister, had complained several times to Borka's father, but he always said:

"I don't meddle in the kids' business! But if you insist, I'll give my thickhead a good hiding before your very eyes." Then he added threateningly: "Till he's more dead than alive!"

"Oh, no, don't do that!" Aunt Klava exclaimed in alarm. "Perhaps I made a mistake."

"That's more like it," he growled in his deep voice. "You should use your eyes. Before complaining like that..." And he shouted after her: "Get yourself a pair of glasses!"

Then he would say to Borka:

"I saved you that time, so you can take the fruit cart to the market today!" His father was fond of money and spent whole days at the market. In summer Borka's family slept on camp beds in the yard and let their house to holidaymakers. And the summer kitchen, and the barn. They would have let the dog's kennel too, only they didn't have one.

Aunt Klava used to say that Borka had grown too quickly.

"His brain's too small for his body," she explained to Zhenka.

"Then he hasn't grown enough," Zhenka argued. "His brain needs to catch up." Just think if he'd said that to Borka!

If Zhenka's father, the sea captain, had known what was happening, he would not have gone to sea. Well, perhaps he would have, but his parting words would have been:

"A sailor's son must learn to stand on his own two feet, and not to snivel."

No, he, Zhenka, wouldn't tell his father. He probably would have told his mother... Just to ask her advice. But his mother had gone to stay with his father in the town of Zhdanov where his cargo ship was being repaired after the last voyage.

So now Zhenka was without both his parents, and life was getting more and more miserable, and Aunt Klava couldn't help him one little bit. How could anyone handle Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts? To make things worse, Vitka Mum Trap

had a huge dog, a cross between a Great Dane and an Alsatian! When it stood on its hind paws, it was probably taller than Zhenka's father. Well, perhaps not. But if it lifted its ears, it would be alright! And it had the terrible name of Fantomas.

The other day Zhenka and the Moshkin twins had been sunbathing on an empty stretch of pebbly beach, when suddenly who should appear but Borka, Giggle Guts and Mum Trap with his dog.

"I'm going home!" Zhenka jumped up.

"Same here!" up jumped the Moshkins.

"Stop!" Borka grinned.

They stopped.

"Over here!" Borka ordered.

They ran over to him. He got undressed in a leisurely fashion.

"Rub me with this." He took a jar of vaseline out of his pocket.

Giggle Guts giggled, Mum Trap nodded, and Fantomas looked at his master and



nodded too, baring his big teeth and sticking out his long pink tongue, evidently in scorn.

There was nothing for it... The Moshkins rubbed Boris' legs, and Zhenka his back. "Harder!"

Frightened they started rubbing so hard that ... Borka fell down.

Giggle Guts wanted to giggle and his throat gave a gurgling sound, but he stopped short and began breathing heavily. Mum Trap wanted to nod, but he stopped short and knitted his brows. Fantomas looked at his master, wanted to nod too, then thought better of it as well, knitted his brows and growled ferociously.

"Well..." Borka hissed threateningly, without getting up.

Zhenka and the Moshkins, quaking inwardly at what their hands had wrought, looked beseechingly at him.

"For that..." Borka said after a moment's thought, "the slaves will carry me into the sea."

The "slaves" picked him up and carried him, stumbling, down to the sea. He sat for a while, wriggling his toes in the water, then announced:

"And now I would like ... fried newly-laid eggs."

Giggle Guts giggled and Mum Trap and the dog nodded.

The Moshkins and Zhenka raced off like the wind. You just try arguing with Borka! Life was quite bad enough without that! This was not the first time, so they knew what to do. Scraping together eighteen copecks, they bought two eggs at the shop, then hurried back to Zhenka's Aunt Klava who kept three hens in the barn, but it was no use asking her. And you couldn't just take them without asking, because she counted them. She knew very well how many eggs her hens lay each day.

So Zhenka took two eggs from the barn and put the two shop ones in their place.

A small bonfire was crackling by the sea. The fried eggs made a delicious spitting sound on the piece of tin. Borka tried a piece. Fantomas drooled.

"Salt!" Borka ordered curtly. The Moshkins and Zhenka leapt up.

"And kvass! Nice and cold! With raisins!" Borka shouted after them.

And then... Then Aunt Klava took the salt-cellar and the jug of kvass qui-



etly away from Zhenka, put it all down quietly in the porch and gave her beloved nephew such a clout that he ran into the street where the Moshkin twins were waiting anxiously for him.

After that Borka really had it in for Zhenka. Probably because he'd had to eat the fried eggs without salt. Without kvass to wash it down.

That evening Aunt Klava tried to make it up with her nephew. On such occasions she used to refer to herself as grandma for some reason.

"What's the matter with you? Angry with your grandma, are you? I'll do you a nice egg for supper."

She went into the barn and came out staring in amazement at the two eggs in her hand. They had the shop stamp on them.

Then there was that time, the day before yesterday. Zhenka's eight-year-old neighbour Kesha was sitting on the quay with a fishing rod. Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts crept up.



"Bark," Borka whispered into Fantomas' ear.

The dog gave a deafening howl, which frightened Kesha so much that he fell into the water, fishing rod and all. He floundered about desperately, his mouth wide open. Borka immediately dived in and dragged him to the shore.

"I rescued you," he told the terrified Kesha proudly. "I don't want a medal. If anyone asks who rescued you, just say you don't know. But you must give me half the fish you catch from now on. You owe your life to me."

"Th-thanks," Kesha stuttered. "Alright, I will."

"Start biting, fishes, large and small," Borka wished him good luck and went off to his friends who were standing by the quay, smirking.

Nearby some little girls were skipping.

"Come on, lads..." Borka said sternly. Giggle Guts and Mum Trap took away the girls' skipping rope and stretched it across the quay.

"I declare this Olympic 'skip and hop' competition..." Boris took a penknife out of his pocket and cut the rope in two. "Open!"

The girls started crying. Fantomas growled, and they stopped.

The pals continued on their way. And further along their way the Moshkin twins were busy building the Eiffel Tower with sticks and wet sand.

"It'll fall down ... any moment now," their only spectator, Zhenka, said anxiously.

"Mine won't fall down," the twins replied confidently in unison. "I know what I'm doing."

They were so engrossed, that they did not notice Borka and his pals. Borka stretched out one foot and winked at Mum Trap. Mum Trap nodded and winked at Fantomas. Fantomas nodded and gave a deafening bark behind Zhenka's back. Zhenka stepped back, tripped over Borka's outstretched foot and fell onto the tower, burying it under him.

"You've knocked our nice tower down!" wailed the Moshkin twins.

"So what!" Borka laughed, giving them each a flick on the head.

Giggle Guts giggled. Mum Trap nodded. And Fantomas the dog smiled his stupid doggy smile.

That night Zhenka had a dream that seemed real. And it seemed real, because in Moscow Zhenka had a cousin called Misha who was older than he, the son of his father's uncle, so he must be Zhenka's uncle, mustn't he? Exactly how old he was, Zhenka did not know, but he knew it was a lot. Perhaps fourteen, or even fifteen. Each year they invited him to the seaside, but he could never get away. Either he was training for some sports competition or his parents would not let him go. This year Zhenka's mother had asked as usual in her letters: "When's Misha coming to stay with us at the seaside?" She had invited him this summer too, but had not received a reply yet. And Zhenka dreamt, just imagine, that this Uncle Misha of his was coming at last! And Uncle Misha was no ordinary person, but a famous yachtsman! There had even been a photo in the *Pioneer* magazine of Uncle Misha

on an Optimist class schwebboot storming the waves of the Moscow Sea. He was proudly tightening the rigging, and each of his fists looked as big as melons on the photo.

"My uncle's coming!" Zhenka shouted to the hooligans in his sleep. "From Moscow! Today! He'll show you. You, and you, and you!" he listed his persecutors. "And you'd better look out too!" he added threateningly to Fantomas the dog.

Borka and his pals were standing by the ruined sand tower.

Whoo-oo-oo, howled the wind, almost a whirlwind, almost a tornado, almost a simoom, carrying Fantomas away with it.

In front of Borka and his pals, who were quaking with fear, stood a big, muscular Uncle Misha in a panama hat, short trousers and gym shoes, his powerful arms crossed on his chest, his shoulders as broad as goal posts. Striding forward, he tripped over a huge boulder, picked it up angrily and tossed it into the sea. It landed somewhere in Turkish territorial waters.

Then Uncle Misha stretched his fingers wide, put one hand on the heads of Mum Trap and Giggle Guts and the other on Borka's and made an L-support. The three hooligans sank up to their necks in the sand.

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts struggled frantically, but could not get out. They stared piteously after Uncle Misha, who was walking calmly away.

Then Zhenka woke up. Aunt Klava was shaking his shoulder:

"Misha's flying out from Moscow to see you," she gabbled. "We're meeting him tomorrow evening. You can spend the holidays together, thank goodness. He'll keep an eye on you."

A dream come true, as they say.

"They'll be sorry tomorrow!" cried Zhenka happily.

"I was relying on you..."

Borka and his pals were playing dominoes as usual, and Fantomas the dog was yawning with boredom.

Waving his precious copy of last year's *Pioneer* like the flag of victory, Zhenka yelled out to them from a safe distance:

"Hey, you lot! Tomorrow evening my uncle's flying in from Moscow!" He opened the magazine at the right page and showed them the photo. "There he is! He'll give you what-for!"

Borka, Mum Trap, Giggle Guts and Fantomas stood up.

"He'll give you a good hiding, Borka! And you, Mum Trap, and you, Giggle Guts!" Zhenka crowed. "And you too, Fantomas, the no-tailed dog!"

"Let's have a closer look at your uncle. Don't be scared!" Borka said slyly.

"I'll tell him everything!" shouted Zhenka, not noticing that Mum Trap and Giggle Guts had slipped into Borka's yard. From that yard it was easy to go into the next one and cut off Zhenka's escape route.

"I'll tell him everything alright!" Zhenka yelled exultantly.

Borka took a step towards him. Zhenka retreated, still repeating:

"I'll tell him everything..." but not as confidently as before.

"Come on, show me your uncle, Yenokhin," Borka smiled reassuringly.

At this moment the crafty Mum Trap and Giggle Guts jumped through the gateway of the neighbouring house and seized the magazine in a vice-like grip.

Zhenka raced off with the dust cover in his hand, turning round and shouting:

"You'll be sorry tomorrow... And the day after too!"

Mum Trap and Giggle Guts obediently handed the magazine to Borka. He looked at the photograph of the muscle-boy grasping the rigging in his melon-like fists and read out the caption in a halting voice:

"Moscow champion ... in the Optimist schwerboot class ... Misha ... Yenokhin..."

Not taking his eyes off the fists in the photograph, Giggle Guts said miserably:

"It all fits—Yenokhin."

"What time does the Moscow flight get in?" Borka asked worriedly.

"We're goners, no matter what time it gets in," said Giggle Guts in a resigned voice.

"He won't drown us, will he?" he asked Mum Trap, sounding really scared.

"Will he drown us?"

Mum Trap nodded gloomily. The dog nodded too.

All day they went over the possible forms of terrible revenge which Zhenka's uncle might choose.

"He might even think of doing this," Borka exclaimed in horror. "Taking the dog by the tail and whipping us with it. How about that!"

"That's nothing," Giggle Guts muttered. "Wait till he twists your nose. It'll go all rubbery."

Mum Trap nodded.

The following evening, an hour before the bus from the airport was due in the town, Borka and his pals hid behind a bench. No one would notice them there, and they could easily watch the bus stop through the cracks.

They were so scared, that when the bus drew up and the first person to alight was a tall African, Giggle Guts nudged Borka in the side with his elbow and hissed:

"Is that him?"

"Doesn't look much like him," Borka replied uncertainly.

Then Zhenka and his aunt got out, with a stream of passengers behind them.

"I can't see him," Borka sighed with relief. "I can see Zhenka, but not his uncle."

"Wait here, while I get some kefir," said Aunt Klava and hurried into the milk shop.

Zhenka watched miserably as the big African picked up a heavy trunk that looked like a mediaeval treasure chest. Behind the trunk stood Uncle Misha...

Borka and his pals stared at Misha in amazement.

"Tom Thumb," Borka smirked. Giggle Guts giggled. And Mum Trap nodded.

"Looks stubborn," Borka continued.

"Must be a coward," Giggle Guts concluded. "I always look stubborn if I'm feeling cowardly. That's what cowards are like."

"And he's Mummy's little boy," Borka remarked scornfully. "Look at his pretty parting and ironed trousers, as if he's going to the theatre! Tee-hee!"

"Just take a look at Zhenka," Giggle Guts tittered. "It's the end of the world for him!"

Zhenka was a sorry sight indeed.

"You were bigger on the photo," he said slowly. "Remember what big fists you had!"

"Perspective," Misha answered briefly, looking around curiously.

"What's that?"

"You're close up now," Misha explained readily. "If you were photographed from here, you'd look higher than that street light on the photo..."

"Are you really thirteen?!" asked Zhenka doubtfully.

"Twelve and a half," Misha replied regretfully. "So what?"

"You're rather small," Zhenka remarked gloomily. "I was relying on you, but you're too small. It's no good..."

"What's the matter? Are you afraid of me?"

"No," Zhenka muttered miserably. "But you're rather small..."

"Napoleon was small too," Misha snapped back.

"But that was Napoleon," Zhenka said in a hopeless voice.

Pushing their way through the crowd, the smirking Borka and his pals walked up to Misha and Zhenka.

Zhenka froze to the spot.

"I've got a brother older than me, who goes each day to the nursery," Borka chanted loudly, eyeing Misha up and down scornfully. Giggle Guts giggled. And Mum Trap nodded.

Zhenka stepped back. Misha instinctively did the same, but then he rapped out unexpectedly:

"With that big mouth all covered in jam, he ought to spend all day in a pram."

Giggle Guts started cackling, but Borka gave him such a look that he shut his mouth quickly and restrained his laughter.

Borka put his foot on a bench and began undoing his long shoelace. Mum Trap and Giggle Guts did the same. They didn't yet know why, but they were used

to copying everything their leader did.

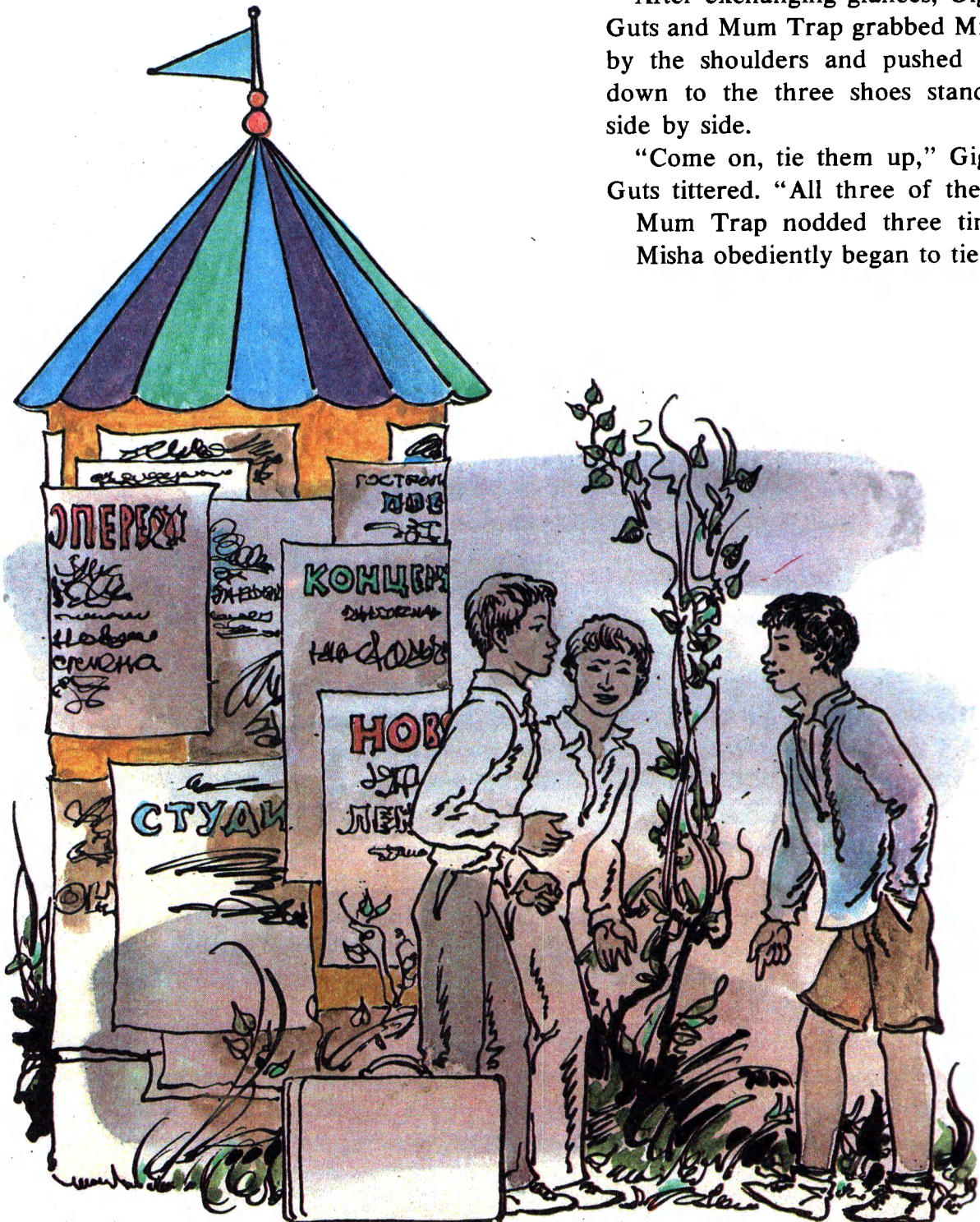
"Tie our shoelaces. In a pretty bow," Borka ordered.

After exchanging glances, Giggle Guts and Mum Trap grabbed Misha by the shoulders and pushed him down to the three shoes standing side by side.

"Come on, tie them up," Giggle Guts tittered. "All three of them."

Mum Trap nodded three times.

Misha obediently began to tie the



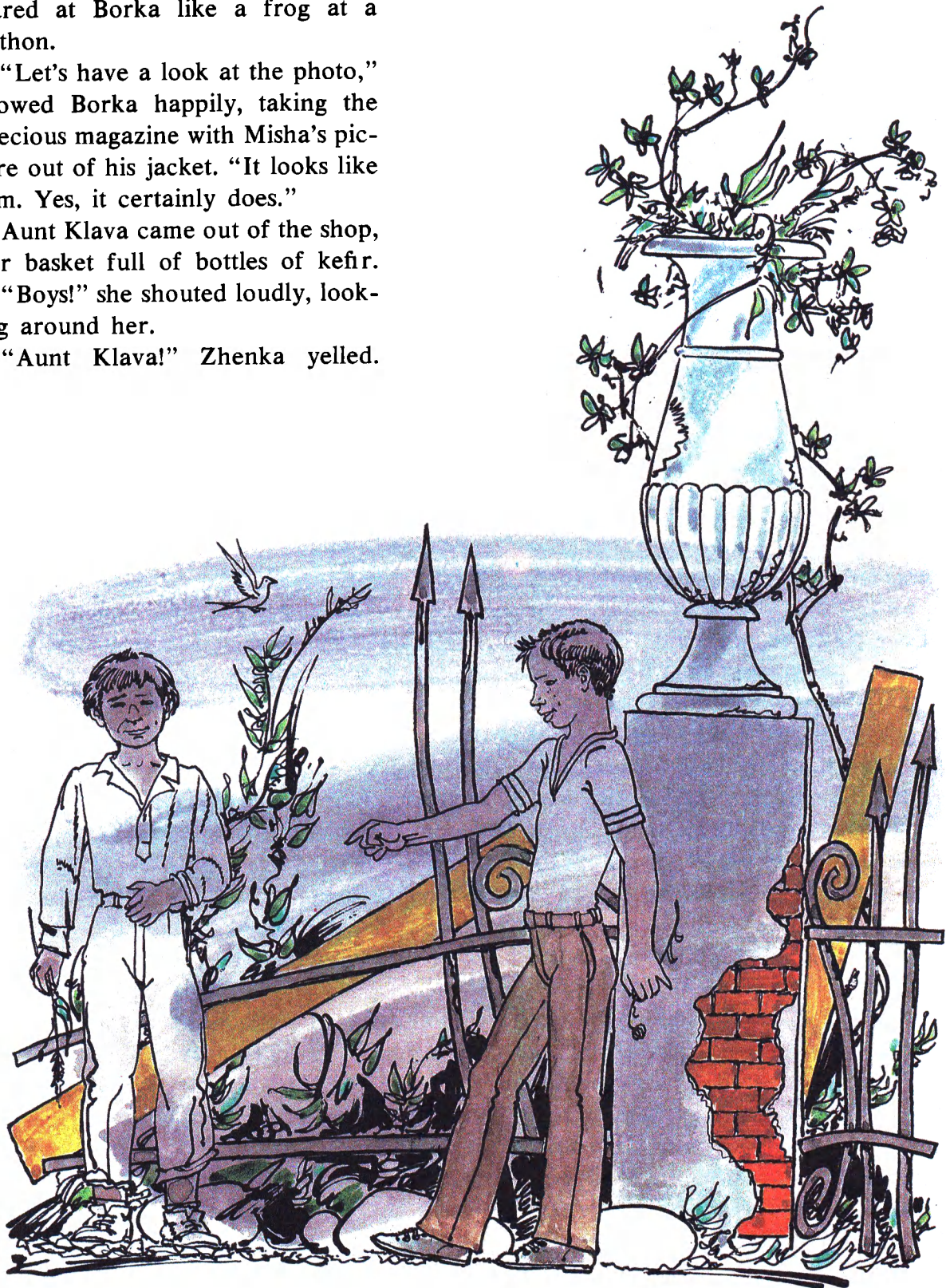
shoelaces. The horrified Zhenka stared at Borka like a frog at a python.

"Let's have a look at the photo," crowed Borka happily, taking the precious magazine with Misha's picture out of his jacket. "It looks like him. Yes, it certainly does."

Aunt Klava came out of the shop, her basket full of bottles of kefir.

"Boys!" she shouted loudly, looking around her.

"Aunt Klava!" Zhenka yelled.



Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts made to rush off and fell in a heap on the ground. They kicked about wildly, but could not get loose from one another. Misha had tied their shoelaces together!

"Cuckoo!" Misha said, picking up his suitcase and walking away after Zhenka and Aunt Klava.

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts sat by the litter bin, morosely untying their laces.

"It's a reef knot," Giggle Guts complained. "Pity we didn't take Fantomas. I can't reach it with my teeth, but he'd have done it easily..."

Borka silently took out his handkerchief and tied a knot in it, staring after the receding figure of Misha.

"I won't forget that".

"Saitotal"

Zhenka's room was in the attic. The house had a steep roof, and the attic had been turned into a bedroom.

"The proper name for it is a mansard," Zhenka announced, when they were carrying a camp bed up there for Misha.

Misha liked the room very much: the walls sloping like a tent, the round window like a porthole, and the tiny balcony like a ship's bridge. The balcony could be reached from the yard by a narrow staircase with a cable handrail, which he immediately christened the jacob's ladder.

From up here you could see the port and the big ships. Their many tiers of lights reflected in the water made the ships look like skyscrapers from a distance. The wind blew the curtains, and you could hear the sound of the sea. Cars drove past outside, their headlights flashing over Misha's open suitcase with a pile of books and brochures: *Rigging Yachts*, *A Dictionary of Sea Terms*, *How to Build a Boat* and *The Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne, as well as a compass, code flags, a sea flag and a telescope with copper rings green with age. Zhenka surveyed all these treasures with delight. By the light of his pocket torch Misha spread a map out on the floor.

"Shall I put the light on?" whispered Zhenka. For some reason you always feel like whispering in the dark, even in semi-darkness.

"There's no need. It's more fun like this," Misha replied also in a whisper. He pointed to a mysterious line zigzagging on the map in red pencil. "Now look... We go out of the Black Sea through the Kerch Straits into the Sea of Azov... Along here..." he traced the route with a pencil. "Then along the Don ... the Volga-Don Canal ... the Volga ... Saratov ... Kuibyshev ... Ulyanovsk ... Kazan ... Gorky ... Yaroslavl..."

Zhenka looked and listened entranced.

"...Then we go past the Rybinsk Reservoir... Along the Volga-Baltic Canal into Lake Onega... Down the River Svir into Lake Ladoga... Along the Neva past Leningrad into the Gulf of Finland... Past Cape Kopor ... the Gulf of Narva ... and we're in Tallinn!"

"The TV Travellers' Club!" exclaimed Zhenka in delight, who was exceptionally well-informed for his age thanks to television. He hardly ever missed an interesting programme or film.

"It's not a club or a film, it's a real journey we're going to make," Misha replied sternly. "To Tallinn."

"We're going to sail to Tallinn?" Zhenka gasped and lay down on the floor next to Misha.

"Why do you think I came here, eh? Why did I show you the water route to Tallinn on the map?"

"Why? I thought that was just because it's interesting..."

"It's interesting alright," Misha grinned. "We'll build a sailing boat, go into training and ... sail to Tallinn. See?" he said dreamily. "People are coming from all over by train and plane to watch the Regatta. But we'll go by boat!"

"All that way?" Zhenka asked doubtfully, looking at the map.

"That's just the beginning," Misha said airily. "A trial of strength... After that maybe we'll sail round the world!"

Zhenka imagined Misha and him sailing through the stormy ocean. Lightning was flashing in the sky and rain was pelting down, but the boat stayed steadily on course—Zhenka was at the helm. "How shall I set her, skipper?" he shouted loudly to Misha, over the noise of the storm. "Sou'-west!" Misha cried. "Hold that course!" "Aye, aye, skipper!" replied Zhenka, clenching his short clay pipe between his teeth. "Cape Horn!" Misha shouted. "Bear leeward." "Aye, aye, skipper!" Zhenka called. The storm died down... Treacherous Cape Horn was already behind them... The boat sped over the calm sea. A passing whaler fired a salute from its cannon in their honour. "Our Bulgarian friends," Misha said, lowering his telescope. On and on sped the boat, and below it ... turned the globe of earth.

"But that's later... This is what we're going to do now, look!" came Misha's voice bringing Zhenka to reality.

Misha placed a big album in front of him, with the word SAITOTAL written on the front in fine big letters.

"SAI-TO-TAL," Zhenka read out. "What's that?"

"It's a code name. A cypher. Sailing to Tallinn!" Misha explained proudly.

"But Misha..." Zhenka wriggled, still doubtful. "Will we be able to manage it?"

"People have managed to sail over oceans. So we should be able to sail through our own country! The French doctor Bombard managed it. And so did the elderly Englishman Francis Chichester. The Queen even gave him a medal for it!" Misha

said excitedly, leafing through the album and showing pictures of famous seafarers. "Thor Heyerdahl sailed on his 'Ra'! And our lot on the 'Shchelya'! And here's Captain Emily!"

"Emily?" said Zhenka in surprise. "A captain?"

"The famous old lady of seventy who went from England to the port of Darwin in Australia! All on her own!"

"She swam there?" Zhenka's eyes almost popped out of his head. "Did she use the crawl or the breast stroke?"

"On a yacht, stupid," Misha said good-humouredly. "Look how far she sailed!" He traced a line with his pencil on the map from London to Darwin, showing Grandma Emily's route.

Zhenka stretched out his fingers and measured the distance she had covered. Then he measured the route that Misha had in mind for them. It was longer.

"Ooh," Zhenka said slowly. "We've got that far to go!" He stretched his arms wide



apart. "But, of course," he said thoughtfully, "we can turn round and come home any time we like. Sail as far as we can, eh?"

Misha looked at him pityingly.

"What are you worrying about? It's four thousand kilometres at the very most! If we cover a hundred a day, the whole thing will take us about forty days."

"A hundred a day!" Zhenka repeated doubtfully.

"Ten hours at ten kilometres an hour—that makes a hundred! It's not that much," Misha explained. "Of course, unforeseen things crop up. So add another twenty days, say. We could sail that far in two months! Grown-ups have sailed much further than that! Without food or drink! And shown it can be done! No boys have done it yet! We'll show them alright! The whole world!"

"Without food or drink?" Zhenka asked in alarm.

"Oh, no, with food and drink," Misha said in a bored voice. "Yes, the things we'll do!" he cheered up. "In a year or two, like I said, we'll sail round the world, when we've had a bit of practice after sailing to Tallinn!"



"My dad will be surprised when he comes home to find that I've gone to sea!" Zhenka laughed. "Will I be able to sail the boat?"

"Yes, I'll teach you. I've been sailing schwertboots for three years now at our yachting club. I've got enough know-how," said Misha impressively.

They went on planning and arguing, never dreaming that at this very moment Borka and his pals were planning a terrible revenge.

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts had crept quietly into their yard. Aunt Klava was afraid of fire, which explained the enormous fire extinguisher that had been hanging on the wall by the porch for ages. Borka and Giggle Guts took it down carefully, and Mum Trap climbed up a tree with branches which stretched over the house and up onto the roof. Then he let down a rope to his pals and they tied the fire extinguisher to it. Perched comfortably astride the gable, Mum Trap pulled up the fire extinguisher, then began to lower it carefully onto Zhenka's window-sill so that it would bang against the window and start squirting into the room.

Smirking gleefully, Borka and Giggle Guts stood by the house watching the shadows of their "enemies" flitting to and fro in the open window.

Mum Trap hit the side of the window, and the fire extinguisher started spraying with a roar, but then the rope got twisted and the foam squirted down onto Borka and Giggle Guts instead of into the room.

There were some ear-splitting yells! Then followed a thump as the fire extinguisher fell to the ground, and Mum Trap's hurried footsteps on the roof.

Leaning out of the window Misha and Zhenka stared in amazement at the foam-covered figures running for their lives.

"It's them!" Zhenka realised with horror. "I'll sail anywhere you like with you ... anything to get away from Borka."

Misha burst out laughing, holding his sides.

"What a hoot!" he howled. An alarmed Aunt Klava appeared in the porch.

"Is there a fire?" she asked, staring at the extinguisher which was still squirting out foam. "Well, look at that ... it must have fallen off the hook!"

There was a cracking sound, and Mum Trap fell off the broken branch into the rose-bushes and took to his heels.

Aunt Klava sat down in the porch.

"Did you see that? It was a monkey."

"Help, I'll split my sides!" Misha and Zhenka howled at the window, doubled up with laughter. "A monkey! Three of them! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Don't you laugh," said Aunt Klava, offendedly. "Are you blind? See how it streaked off! There are lots of them in the Crimea now. There were some articles in the paper! They come over here from the Sukhumi monkey breeding farm. Anthropoid chimpanzees! Did you notice how like a human it looked?"

And she ran off to tell her neighbour about the monkey.

“We’re not sailing anywhere!”

Early in the morning, when the milk-women were crying “Milk” all round the town in their loud voices, Misha and Zhenka went off to the sea.

“Don’t have too much sun,” warned Aunt Klava. “Especially you, Misha. You’ll get burnt! See?”

“Alright,” he called from outside the gate.

“Lunch is at two. Don’t be late!” And Aunt Klava began repairing the damage done to her rose-bushes by the “monkey”.



To her great surprise she found some mysterious scraps of material on the thorns and broken branches. Had she been able to fit them to the holes in Mum Trap's trousers and shirt, she would have taught him not to jump on her beloved roses!

Misha and Zhenka walked to the sea. It looked incredibly high up above the houses, separated from the sky by the thin thread of the horizon. And it seemed that if this thread were suddenly cut by the keel of a boat, sky and sea would flow together.

"I've brought some money with me," Misha was telling Zhenka. "I saved it by not having school dinners. Ten roubles."

"Hey!" Zhenka exclaimed.

"It's not enough for a quarter of a sail," said Misha sadly. "And certainly not for a boat. Do you know how much it would cost to build a boat?"

"A lot," Zhenka said. "Several thousands."

"Several thousands of what?" asked Misha in surprise. "Roubles?"

"No, materials," Zhenka replied calmly.

"You're crackers," laughed Misha, then added seriously: "The best thing would be to find an old boat and repair it. You don't know of anything, do you?"

"Yes, I do," Zhenka replied excitedly. "There are piles of them on the deserted quay. All sorts," he gabbled. "Big ones, small ones, flat-bottomed fishing boats, skiffs, long boats, punts."

"That's great!" exclaimed Misha happily.

Zhenka stole a look at the telescope sticking out of Misha's pocket and asked:

"Can I have a look? It's not just for fun. I want to look at the old quay and see whether the watchman's on duty today."

"The watchman," Misha repeated miserably. "Who'll give us a boat if there's watchman. If someone's keeping watch over them, they must still be needed."

"We'll ask," Zhenka said.

"We'll have a try. Perhaps some fishermen would give us a sail, a torn one they don't need."

"And we'll mend it," Zhenka said eagerly. "We weren't born yesterday."

They turned a corner, and Zhenka suddenly stopped short in horror.

"We're not sailing anywhere!" he blurted out desperately.

Right in front of them, blocking the way, stood Borka and his pals. Misha and Zhenka stared fascinated, as Borka slowly pulled the handkerchief with the knot out of his pocket.

"I said I wouldn't forget," he hissed, rhythmically tapping his hand with the knot.

"Run, Misha!" cried Zhenka and took to his heels for dear life. He wove in and out of the alleys, racing across backyards, frightening clucking hens, climbing over fences, dashing through and under gates, and all the time he seemed to hear footsteps pursuing him.



When he finally stopped exhausted and looked round there were no pursuers to be seen. He couldn't decide whether he had imagined it or whether he had shaken them off.

Zhenka trudged back to the house. The nearer he got, the more his faint heart was tormented by merciless thoughts, "I was a coward! I left Misha on his own! He probably didn't know where to run, because he doesn't know the town! He'll write me off from the boat."

Turning into his street, Zhenka caught sight of Misha. He was climbing slowly up to their house, and his back was hunched so miserably that Zhenka nearly burst out crying.

He ran after Misha, caught him up and began:

"I told you they wouldn't let us past..."

Misha walked on in silence, without turning round to Zhenka who was scurrying along behind, trying to justify himself.

"There's no getting away from Borka, and we'll never have a boat 'cos they'll wreck it. They won't leave anyone alone: not baldy Kolka, or Kesha who's always fishing, or Vovochka, or Big Petyunya! To say nothing of the girls!"

"How many of you are there?" Misha asked, still not turning round.

"Wait a minute, I'll count!" Frowning and concentrating hard, Zhenka began to count on his fingers, moving his lips silently. "Twenty-seven, including me!" he announced finally.

Misha turned round.

"Twenty-eight."

He had a black eye.

"Psychological warfare"

You can't imagine how much time and energy it took to gather together all the "insulted and humiliated"—twenty-seven boys and girls. Absolutely ages, and they were quite worn out. And the patience it required to persuade everyone to stand up all together against Borka and his pals! That took ages too. Their tongues worked so hard they nearly dropped off.

"They've got that great dog!" Kesha kept saying.

"But they wouldn't let him harm anyone. They don't want to go to prison," Misha countered hoarsely.

"And Borka's got such big fists!" the Moshkin twins cried in unison. "He'll bash us up."

"But think how many fists we've got! Fifty-eight including Zhenka's against six! That's fifty-two more than them!" Misha retorted.

That argument worked. They counted their fists and it turned out that they really did have fifty-two more!

"Lead on!" cried Kesha the fisherboy, brandishing his long fishing rod menacingly over his head.

"Follow me, everyone!" yelled a podgy little boy, standing up on the pedals of his tricycle and waving his wooden sabre.

The crowd of boys and girls raced along the street to the sea, picking up more and more new kids whom Zhenka had not counted and who had heard about the forthcoming battle.

"They're only strong because they stick together!" Misha told his "army" excitedly. "But look how many of us there are!"

"They won't dare to bash us up on our own now!" Zhenka shouted triumphantly.

The "army" turned the corner and slowed down at the sight of Borka and his pals, who were playing dominoes as usual on the bench by the iron gate.

"Hooray!" The podgy boy on the tricycle who was leading them braked suddenly and turned round, waving his sabre aggressively. "Hooray! Hooray!"

The front ranks stopped, but those behind them surged forward, and the crowd bore down on the bench.

"Well?" said Misha meaningfully to the hooligans, who looked vacantly at the crowd, then huddled over their dice again.

"I've won!" Borka flung the dice down on the bench with a loud rattle.

The whole crowd shuddered, except for Misha.

"Help..." squeaked a little girl, dropping her dolly.

"We'll make mincemeat of them!" came a solitary cry from Zhenka in the midst of the "attackers".

Borka got to his feet.

"I'll count up to three," he said lazily, then barked, "One!"

Someone in the crowd gave a nervous cry, and everyone immediately turned tail and ran for dear life, shouting and squealing.

Misha shouted in a vain attempt to stop them:

"Don't be afraid! There are lots of us!"

His whole "army" had taken to its heels, with the podgy boy out in front again on his tricycle. Perhaps because he was riding so quickly, everyone instinctively tried to keep up with him.

Misha was alone again, once more deserted by Zhenka. Borka grabbed his telescope with a laugh and said:

"Scram, while the going's good." Then he added: "Paganel," an insulting reference to Misha's height, because Jules Verne's scientist Paganel was very tall, as you know.

Misha bravely tried to get his telescope back. But Mum Trap and Giggle Guts grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him so hard that he skidded a few metres until he was stopped by the clanging iron gate.

The gang calmly went off into Mum Trap's yard. The gate slammed and the latch clicked.

Misha climbed over the fence.

Watching from a distance, behind a tree, Zhenka saw the gate open and Misha being pushed out. He climbed in again. Again the gate opened and Misha appeared clinging to his telescope. Someone who Zhenka could not see was obviously pulling one end, while Misha pulled the other. It stretched out as far as it would go, then—crack! Misha fell to the ground. They had broken the telescope in two.

Misha climbed over the fence again. Fantomas the dog had been let out of the house and leapt at him, growling fiercely. Misha jumped back into the street smartish. Now he was forced to retreat.

He set off home again, and again his back drooped so miserably that Zhenka almost burst out crying again. Once more he caught Misha up and howled:

"Now they'll bash us up every day. Together and on our own!"

"Nitroglycerine"

It grew dark. The distant roll of the sea seemed closer now. They lit the lamp on the verandah, and a crowd of dazzled moths, gnats and other insects did a fluttering dance around it.

Misha sat on the camp bed with a thick book, *The Mysterious Island*, but his thoughts were far away. The lines blurred before his eyes.

"What are we going to do?" Misha asked quietly.

Zhenka rolled over in bed and said flatly:

"Am I a coward, Misha?"

"You? Yes. So am I. You were afraid of Borka, and I was afraid of the dog."

"No, I'm not a coward," Zhenka sniffed. "I'm just afraid of him."

Suddenly Misha buried his head in the book.

"In order to obtain sulphuric acid," he read out loudly, "the engineer had to perform only one more operation." He turned the page over feverishly. "Here we are... 'Cyrus Smith brought his friends a vessel containing a liquid and said briefly: 'Here is the nitroglycerine!' And nitroglycerine it was indeed, that terrifying substance with ten times the explosive force of gunpowder, which has caused so much harm.'"

Misha raised his head. His eyes were shining. Zhenka walked barefoot over to him and gazed curiously at the drawing of a terrible explosion in the book.

"Just look at that!" he exclaimed admiringly.

"Wait a minute," Misha brushed him aside, struck by a sudden idea, and peered at the book again. "I see... 'Sulphur pyrites, nitric acid, glycerine and fresh water...'

And fresh water," he repeated thoughtfully. "That's the formula! See if Aunt Klava's gone to bed, Zhenka."

"Okay." Zhenka ran to the window and looked out. "There's no light on the verandah."

"Get dressed," Misha jumped up. "Let's go!"

"Where?"

"You'll see." Misha pulled on his trousers quickly.

The two boys crept quietly down the stairs which creaked terribly at that late hour, something they never did in the daytime. Then they tiptoed across the yard and went out through the gate, which creaked incredibly loudly, something it never did in the daytime. The street was empty, and each of their stealthy footsteps rang out in the darkness. Under their feet the cinders, sand and pebbles crunched terribly, something they never did in the daytime. They crept up to the iron gate of Mum Trap's house, where Borka's gang usually gathered. And the gate creaked terribly too. You should have heard it! The wind blew the rusty hinges, and they snarled like watchdogs.

Zhenka slipped into the yard, feeling his heart beat fast because it didn't want him to go in there. But Zhenka couldn't let Misha down a third time. There are limits even to the most insurmountable cowardice. Particularly as they had thought up this marvellous plan! When Misha had told him on the way here what they were going to do, Zhenka could hardly believe his ears.

"What's the matter?" came Misha's piercing whisper from the street. "Get a move on!"

Misha drew a chalk circle on the gate, and Zhenka tapped quietly with one finger on the gate from the inside.

"Higher," said Misha.

Zhenka tapped higher.

"Lower."

Zhenka tapped lower down.

"To the left," Misha ordered.

Zhenka tapped to the left.

"That's it!" said Misha.

Zhenka drew another chalk circle on the inside of the gate on exactly the same spot as Misha's circle on the other side. Misha crept into the yard. In the moonlight they could see some boulders supporting a sandy slope. Every house had plenty of boulders like that.

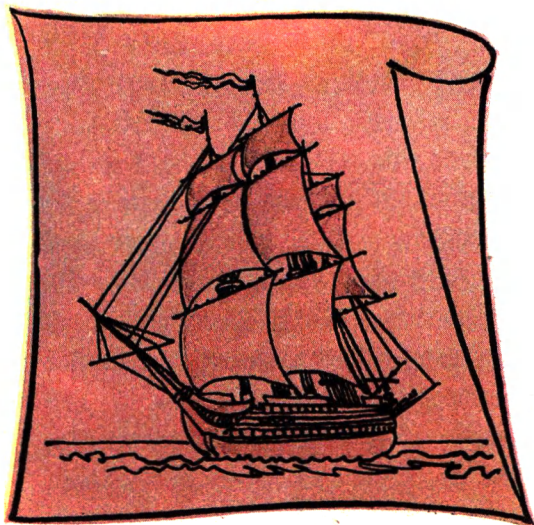
"Choose one that feels right," said Misha.

Zhenka picked up the biggest.

"That's too heavy for you," said Misha and chose another one for him, not so big.

Zhenka picked it up and held it.

"That's okay."



Misha placed the boulder about three metres from the gate.

"Can you throw it that far?"

"C-course I c-can," Zhenka replied, stuttering with excitement.

"Wait for the signal. When I say 'three' you throw it."

They went into the street and set off home, exchanging glances, winking and laughing at each other, and putting their fingers conspiratorially on their lips. Now the pebbles crunched boldly, cheerfully and approvingly under their feet.

All night long Zhenka dreamed of explosions—hand-grenades, shells and even nuclear explosions!

"The way is clear!"

Morning came, with clearcut lines of light and shade in the yards, the noise of the awakening day, the silence of the calm sea and the crowing of the roosters, happy that they had escaped being boiled into soup.

Misha and Zhenka were walking along the street.

"Do you think it'll work?" Zhenka asked anxiously.

"I should say so!" Misha replied confidently.

At the intersection of the two streets they shook hands firmly.

"Don't forget," Misha warned. "I'll count up to three. Throw it straight at the spot."

"I won't miss," said Zhenka. They parted, Zhenka turning right, and Misha left. Misha went slowly so that Zhenka would have time to weave his way through the backyard up to the iron gate opposite Mum Trap's house.

By the gate, as usual, Borka, Mum Trap and Giggie Guts were already playing dominoes. Fantomas the dog was lying lazily on the ground, squinting at passing flies and snapping his teeth menacingly.

Catching sight of Misha, Borka trained his half of the telescope on him and said:

"Nothing doing." Then he stood up, pulled a hideous face and stamped his feet, as if to scare a little child.

Misha walked boldly up to the bench and put his hand into his pocket.

"I know," Borka said, turning to his pals. "He's brought the other half of the telescope along for me. There's a good boy!" He winked at Misha.

Very carefully Misha took a test-tube containing some transparent liquid out of his pocket and removed the stopper.

"Nitroglycerine," he announced curtly. "Sudden movement makes it explode."

"He-elp! He-elp!" Borka chanted. Walking backwards he fell into the outstretched arms of the servile Mum Trap and Giggle Guts. "We'll be blown to smithereens. Have mercy, Misha!" he begged. "Forgive me, please! I won't do it again. Misha! I'm a good chap really, Misha!"

"Give me the telescope," Misha said quietly.

"I'm a nice guy, Misha!" Borka howled, getting into the spirit of the thing. "Please forgive me!"

"Give me the telescope," Misha repeated.

"What telescope?" Boris pretended to look mystified and appealed to his friends for support. "This one? Just a minute. Attention please! Watch the birdie! You'll get the photo tomorrow. Five roubles. In colour."

"Thanks," said Misha. "At last I understand the meaning of the phrase 'to act the fool'."

"I didn't act you," Borka replied. "But I can."

"It might explode." Misha picked the test-tube up again.

"Oh, shiver me timbers! I'm scared stiff! Vitka," the tittering Giggle Guts turned to Mum Trap. "Look at me. I'm as white as a sheet, aren't I?"

Mum Trap nodded and parted his lips in a smile.

"White as a sheet!" Giggle Guts whined. "What will become of me!"

"Give me the telescope. I'll count up to three."

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts went down on their knees and wailed in unison, swaying from side to side:

"Oo-oo-oo..."

"One," said Misha, stealing a glance at the chalk circle on the gates. Behind the gates stood Zhenka, holding a huge granite boulder. It was not the one Misha had chosen yesterday. Zhenka had picked another almost twice the size just in case, and his arms were trembling with the effort.

"Two," said Misha.

"Two-and-a-half," chortled Borka.

"Threel" Misha splashed a drop from the test-tube on the gate, in the circle they had drawn the evening before.

There was a terrible bang! Bits of rusty metal showered over everyone. Zhenka had thrown his heavy boulder against the other side and the gate had collapsed!

You should have seen the commotion! Borka and his pals took to their heels for dear life with Fantomas the dog. Misha, who had not expected such an effect, also started running. His legs seemed to carry him after the inseparable trio and Fan-

tomas of their own accord. The terrified Zhenka immediately dived through a hole in the fence.

Catching up Borka and his pals, Misha stumbled and...

“Don’t drop it!” Borka shouted, and lay down, putting his hands over his head.

Giggle Guts and Mum Trap supported Misha solicitously.

Borka got up and began brushing himself.

“The hooligan...” Borka growled. “He’s got that there explosive glycerine in his pocket and he goes and trips up! You might at least spare yourself!”

“You were saying something about the telescope,” Misha remembered as if by chance.

Borka hastily pulled his half of the telescope out of his jacket and threw it to

Misha, instead of going up to him. Misha caught it without a word, turned round and went down to the sea.

Zhenka found Misha on the seashore. The waves were lapping by his feet, and he was standing, arms crossed on his chest, staring into the distance like a captain at sea.

“Phew, I’m hot. My throat’s dry too,” said Zhenka perkily.

Misha smiled and took out the test-tube. Zhenka opened it and gulped the contents down.

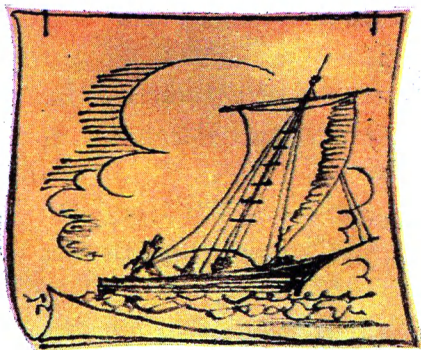
“That was good!” He unbuttoned his shirt and gave himself a resounding slap on the stomach. “Fresh water from the well!”

Misha took the code flags out of his jacket and semaphored something exultantly to the empty sea.

“What’s that?” Zhenka asked.

“The way is clear!”





Part II

HOLD HER STEADY!

“Two cables away from here!”

They got onto the old quay without any trouble. The watchman was not there. The quay smelt of fuel oil, rotten planks, rusty metal and a kind of hospital smell. That was the iodine in the seaweed. Strands of dried seaweed hung on posts far from the shore like indicators showing how high the sea came in the autumn storms.

Zhenka had been right: there were old boats of all shapes and sizes strewn about everywhere. Towering up among them, like an eagle in a flock of crows, was a warped torpedo boat, with some even rows of holes made by large calibre machine-guns.

Misha gazed reverently at the brave torpedo boat. Misinterpreting his look, Zhenka asked in a businesslike voice:

“That one?”

“That one...” Misha grinned.

“Ah,” Zhenka nodded wisely. “It’s too big... Here’s a smaller one!” He strode in front of his “uncle” like a guide, weaving in and out between the boats and waving his hands left and right. “Look at that! How about this? Or that one over there! There’re hundreds of them!”

But Misha did not stop.

“There’s a good one!” Zhenka grabbed his sleeve.

“We must find one close to the sea, or we’ll never get it into the water,” said Misha sensibly.

There were also lots of boats by the water’s edge. Some were dry and warped with the planking coming off and the ribs sticking out.

“There’s a good one!” Zhenka gazed admiringly at a huge barge.

Misha grinned again.

“Well, what about this?” Zhenka nodded towards a small dinghy so eaten by woodworm that it was almost like gauze.

“That’s an old tub too,” Misha replied.

“Why is it a tub?” Zhenka asked, puzzled. “It’ll be a boat, if we mend it.”

“Wait a minute.” A boat lying on a sandy slope unexpectedly attracted Misha’s attention. Its prow was up and there was dark stagnant water in the stern.

“That’s a good one!” Zhenka slapped its worn side and fibbed cheekily: “I’ve had my eye on it for some time.”

Misha walked round the boat and kicked it with his foot. A thick layer of tar fell off.

Zhenka sighed sadly. Misha climbed into the boat and stamped on the ribs with his heel.

“It’s firm enough.”

Zhenka smiled. Misha knocked on the other ribs and said:

“It’s alright. It will be easier to mend this one, than build a new one. Has it really been written off?”

“It doesn’t belong to anyone now.” Zhenka sat down at the prow and shouted: “Full steam ahead!”

"It'll go with a sail!" Misha muttered, banging the sides. "But there's a lot of repairing to do... Too much for just the two of us... Do you know any reliable boys? Who are strong too?"

"Sure. Plenty!" Zhenka assured him.

"We don't want many," Misha grinned. "About two. But they must be reliable."

An elderly man in a greasy jacket came out from behind a pile of empty crates.

"We're going to take this boat..." Zhenka blurted out. "To keep..." he added anxiously.

"We can pay, if it's not too much," Misha said quickly.

"We'll pay you for taking this old junk away."

"How much?" Zhenka asked automatically.

"Alright, that's enough." The man did not feel like joking any longer. "Take it. There's enough rubbish here as it is. We'll have a good old bonfire some time." He made his way between the crates, counting them and writing in his notebook.

"Stand from under!" Misha shouted happily. "She's ours!"

"Hooray!" exclaimed Zhenka. "But how will we take her away?" he asked.

Misha said nothing. They sat on the side of the boat and thought... The sun glittered on the rippling water. A dirty tug with a red stripe on its funnel chugged noisily towards the quay.

Misha suddenly got up, his eyes fixed on the tug.

"Where shall we take it? Do you know?"

"Yes, I do... To the deserted beach. There's no one around there, and plenty of rubbish," Zhenka replied listlessly.

"Come on then," Misha said determinedly.

...The captain of the tug was shaving carefully in front of a small mirror. He turned his head at the knock on the door.

Misha marched in, clicked his heels and stood to attention.

"Permission to speak, Captain?"

"Very well," he said curtly, continuing to shave.

"We are Pioneers with a request, sir," Misha began loudly. "Would you kindly tow a disused vessel..." He paused, searching for the right words. "It's not far away, otherwise they might burn it." He thought for a moment and added: "Like rubbish."

"Like what?" the captain asked.

"Like useless rubbish," Misha explained again for good measure.

"They'll burn it!" Zhenka's head appeared at the open porthole, then vanished again.

The captain was so taken aback that he cut himself.

"You're cut-throats, not Pioneers!" he said angrily, sticking a piece of plaster over the cut. Looking at the desperate Misha, he relented and said: "So you want to be a sailor, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose your father's a sailor, is he?"

"No, sir. He works at the Likhachev Car Factory. Do you know it? He's a Muscovite born and bred, like me."

"And what about your mother?" the captain smiled.

"She's a schoolteacher, sir... They will burn it, sir," Misha said miserably.

"They'll burn it alright!" Zhenka's head appeared at the porthole again and then vanished as before.

The captain was startled, and Misha shook his fist angrily through the porthole, mentally cursing his impertinent nephew.

"Well, my lad," the captain announced angrily, sticking on the second piece of plaster. "Didn't your schoolteacher mother teach you not to disturb people when they've got work to do?"

"But they'll burn it..." Misha muttered hopelessly.

The door opened slightly.

"They'll burn it!" Zhenka poked his head in. "You wouldn't let that happen, would you?"

"Ee, you little devil!" The captain threw his razor onto the table ... and suddenly burst out laughing. "You've put a knife to my throat and no mistake," he said, chuckling away. "Very well. We're going away for three days, but when we come back we'll give your boat a tow. Okay?"

"Oh, no, Captain," Misha shook his head.

"That's no good," Zhenka squealed.

"What?" The captain was taken aback by such ingratitude.

"It must be towed today, Captain," Misha insisted.

And Zhenka repeated automatically:

"They'll burn it."

"But you must understand." The captain began to pace up and down the deck-house agitatedly, even forgetting to wipe the foam off his face. "We're fuelling up now and due to weigh anchor."

"I insist, Captain," Misha would not give an inch.

"So do I," Zhenka nodded.

"Every minute counts," exclaimed the captain.

"For us too, Captain. We won't find another boat, and they'll burn this one," Misha persisted.

"They'll burn it!" Zhenka chimed in again.

"They'll burn it! They'll burn it!" yelled the captain. "It's driving me crazy. Show me where it is and where it has to go."

The boys rushed on deck joyfully.

"Cast off, Nesterchuk!" the captain ordered a young sailor.

When the boat had been loaded on board the tug, Misha and Zhenka climbed into their "vessel" and sat on the middle bench, as if they were afraid the captain might change his mind. The sailors watched them, chuckling to one another.

"Where to?" puffed the captain darkly, his pipe clenched between his teeth.

Misha jumped up.

"Head sou'-west, two cables away from here!"

"For repair," Zhenka said excitedly.

"Two cables away?" the captain smiled at Misha. "Do you know what a cable is, eh?"

"Un..." Misha thought for a minute, then rapped out: "One tenth of a nautical mile, one hundred and eighty-five and two-tenths metres."

The captain spluttered over the smoke from his pipe and went to the deck-house. The sailors gave Misha an approving look.

"Is it a diesel?" Misha asked somewhat self-consciously, when the deck shook and the water foamed out behind the stern.

"Aye," said Nesterchuk the sailor and squatted down beside him.

"An old one?" Misha listened to the sound of the engine.

"Getting on," Nesterchuk agreed.

The quay receded into the distance... Soon the tug moored at the beach. The block and tackle squealed as it lifted their boat from the deck. The boat creaked and swayed in the air.

"Be careful, be careful..." Misha begged.

"Or it'll fall to bits," Zhenka warned sternly. "And we've got to sail on it."

The crane put the boat down gently on the sand between the piles of granite in the most sheltered spot, which Misha who had been surveying the scene, pointed out.

It really was an excellent spot—on the shore of a quiet little cove.

Misha and Zhenka said goodbye to the captain and sailors and shook hands with them.

"Bon voyage!" the captain wished the boys.

The tug cast off and gradually grew smaller. Misha stood in the boat and semaphored a message to the tug, while Zhenka, up to his knees in the water, waved his shirt.

"What are you signalling?" Zhenka asked Misha.

"Bon voyage!"

"So am I," exclaimed Zhenka in surprise.

The receding tug gave them a parting hoot.

“Terrible revenge”

The sun shone brightly, and the shadows were short. Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts sat under a shady plane tree on the embankment. A moist breeze, which seemed to waft in from the sea with each new wave, stirred the leaves and sent a myriad points of light dancing over the boys' gloomy faces. The heat and the cool washed over them in turn.

“It's no easy job getting the better of him,” said Borka darkly.

“I'll say,” Giggle Guts nodded.

“We need some help,” Borka went on. “We must get someone to clobber him so he'll scarper back to Moscow.”

Mum Trap nodded.

The gang counted up all the money they could scrape together.

“Four roubles eighty exactly!”

In the square by the sea two scruffy yoboes in jeans with leather patches shaped like hearts and triangles were kicking their heels.

Borka went up to them hesitantly.

“What is it?” one of the lads asked.

“Some guy needs a bashing up he won't ever forget.”

“Shervof,” the lad growled, which in their language meant “shove off”.

“We'll pay you for it...” Borka put his hand in his pocket.

The lad squinted at the money and picked it up...

“Let's go,” Borka hurried his pals. Then he winked at the others and whispered: “I didn't give them all of it.”

The second lad slapped his friend approvingly on the shoulder and also said with a grin:

“Let's go.”

“Now they'll give Misha a good hiding!” Slavka giggled.

“Not that way,” Borka ran after the boys. “This way.”

“Get lost!” the other two snapped. “Looking for trouble?”

Borka and his pals retreated hurriedly.

“But I gave you the money...” Borka howled. “Give it back ... or come with us.”

“Scram!” the other two barked. “Or you'll be sorry!”

They took a step towards them, and the gang retreated.

“Give us our money back!” Borka whined from a safe distance.

The other two each lifted up a huge fist and calmly walked off, with the gang trailing along behind them. Suddenly the two of them were stopped by a policeman in a white starched cap.

“Still loitering around, you layabouts! You're a disgrace to the town, that's what you are!”

The lads shot a fearful glance at Borka and his pals.

"We're going to get a job soon, officer. If you don't believe us, go and ask in the Housing Office!"

"Perhaps we could tell the policeman they took that money from us. He'd believe us alright!" Giggle Guts whispered to Borka.

"...And if anyone tells tales about us," the two lads looked round at Borka and his pals and said meaningfully, "we'll be on their tails pretty quick, and they won't forget it in a hurry."

"Let's go," Borka said desperately. "We can kiss our money goodbye."

"Better kiss it goodbye, than get bashed on the kisser by that lot," Giggle Guts said wisely. "We wouldn't forget that in a hurry."

And the gang drifted off in the other direction.

"How much have you got left?" asked Giggle Guts.

Boris counted the few remaining coins.

"Fifty ... seventy ... one rouble one copeck. I'll get my revenge alright," Borka hissed darkly.

"On those two?" asked Giggle Guts.

"On Misha."

Giggle Guts gave a nasty goat-like laugh, and Mum Trap nodded.

The Pioneer Patrol

"**Y**ou know what, Misha," Zhenka said. "Ever since we taught Borka a lesson, I don't feel like going swimming. Now we can go where we like and no one will touch us, but I don't want to any more. What about you?" He stopped talking and watched Misha straightening some rusty nails with pincers and pliers. "Let's have a dip."

"Have a dip!" Misha cried angrily, flinging a straightened-out nail onto a pile of other ones on the bottom of the boat. "And who's going to do your training for you? You have to be pretty tough to sail a boat, you know."

"I was just saying I didn't want to have a swim!" Zhenka changed his tack.

"Do you have any warm clothes at home?" Misha asked mysteriously.

"Yes. Why?"

"A sports test in the sun," Misha said meaningfully. "A test of stamina. You must get used to difficulties."

"We'll get used to them alright," Zhenka announced. "Let's nip home while Aunt Klava's at the market. Our wardrobe's full of warm things, my two winter coats, one for when I get bigger, fur caps and scarves! I bet you don't think it gets cold down here in the south. But in winter it can be so cold that it makes your teeth chatter." Zhenka made a chattering sound.

"Only don't make a noise," Misha warned.

While they were getting the warm clothes, Borka and his pals were also busy. In the street they happened to see three boys and a girl with red Pioneer Patrol bands round their sleeves. Borka went up to them quickly.

"Listen, kids," he said in a businesslike voice. "There's a certain holidaymaker here who needs to be taught a lesson."

"Give over," they said to him. "Stop pulling our legs."

"We can't punish him," Borka replied. "Because our boat is just leaving for the town of Azov. But he must be taught a lesson, so he doesn't go on upsetting little children!"

"Little children?" the patrol exclaimed in unison.

"Yes," Giggle Guts confirmed, realising what Borka was up to. "Under fives." He pointed at Mum Trap.

Mum Trap nodded.

"He's very big for his age," Giggle Guts continued. "But he doesn't go to school yet." Then he tapped a finger on Mum Trap's temple. "He's deaf and dumb. And there were two more with him. Only this tall." It emerged from what he showed that the other two only came up to Mum Trap's waist.

Mum Trap nodded.

"They were just walking along yesterday," Borka cut in. "Minding their own business. Singing nice happy songs and writing down the words for him, so he wouldn't get bored."

"Really?" The Pioneer Patrol looked sympathetically at Mum Trap and he nodded.

"Come along with me," said Borka with the indignation of the righteous. "I'll show you where he's hiding."

The Patrol set off after Borka and his pals.

Borka gave them the details as he walked.

"Surname—Yenokhin. First name—Misha. Our Vitka here..." Borka dug Mum Trap in the ribs, who gave a stupid smile, "...was going for a swim with two tiny kids. And some soap!" Borka emphasised. "The public baths in our area are closed. Then who should come along but this Misha! He may be small, but the other day he tied three old-age pensioners' shoelaces together so tightly they couldn't undo them for a week. Just for a laugh!"

"That's nothing!" Giggle Guts took over. "One day they were walking along..." he poked Mum Trap in the ribs too. "Him and two tiny kids, and this Misha comes towards them! 'Out of the way!' he shouts. And just behind them was that iron gate..."

The Patrol and the gang had just turned into the lane where Misha had tried out his "nitroglycerine" not so long ago.

"Over there!" Borka exclaimed, interrupting Giggle Guts. "The little kids," he again pointed at Mum Trap who was breathing heavily, "ran through the gate, but

this Misha, a so-called visitor to our town, whips a flask out of his back pocket, just like an American cowboy. A black flask,” said Borka, lowering his voice. “And on the flask was a skull and crossbones. The kids were scared stiff. And he goes and smashes the flask against the gate. Bang!!! And the little kids...” At this point Borka pretended to start crying and wiped away some imaginary tears, “...hung from these trees here, all covered in dirt, clothes torn, and crying their eyes out.”

“What about Misha?” the patrol were flabbergasted.

“Misha? He couldn’t have cared less! Split his sides with laughing!” Borka said. “Yes, it was that gate over there.”

The patrol gazed dumbfounded at the rusty half of the gate lying on the ground.

“Fresh milk!” cried a milk-woman nearby.

“Excuse me, but did you hear an explosion here a little while ago?” Borka asked her politely.

“I should say so!” she exclaimed, throwing up her hands. “They say it was a German bomb that had been buried in the ground!”

“Hear that?” Borka whispered to the patrol. “A bomb... That’s what they’re saying. But we saw him with our own eyes... His name’s Misha!”

“Where is he now?” the girl with the plaits asked sternly.

“We’ll find him, no matter where he is,” said Borka confidently. “Big head! Thinks just because he’s from the capital, he can do what he likes. Such as chucking glycerine at little kids? Isn’t that right?” he turned to Mum Trap indignantly for confirmation. “Doesn’t he?”

Mum Trap nodded.

“How can he hear you if he’s deaf and dumb?” the girl enquired suspiciously. “With his ears?”

“He can’t hear with his ears at all,” Borka said quickly. “He can lip read!”

“Then why did you write that song down for him, if he can lip read?” the girl persisted.

“So he’d remember it,” said Borka. “You have to hear a song ten times before you can remember. But if it’s written down, it’s as easy as pie.”

“But why should he remember it anyway?” The girl was still doubtful. “He can’t sing it, can he?”

“Yes, he can,” said Borka. “He doesn’t sing aloud, only to himself. Don’t you do that sometimes too?”

“Yes, I do,” the girl had to confess.

Giggle Guts chortled.

Borka looked daggers at him and put his hands on Mum Trap’s shoulder.

“He can do more than that,” Borka boasted. “He can even sing a bit too. Just opens his mouth and goes ‘ooo’, like this!” Borka sang “ooo” to the tune of “The apples and pears were a-blooming.” “Show them, Mum Trap.”

Mum Trap nodded and picked up the refrain.

"Oo-oo-oo..."

"Oo-oo-oo..." Borka and Giggle Guts joined in.

The Pioneer Patrol gave them a rather scared look.

"Show us where he is!" the girl stamped her foot.

"Round this bend!" Borka exclaimed, and the gang raced off. The girl twisted her finger in the air and said, "It looks as if they're all round the bend."

"I know where they are," Borka muttered, looking back at the Patrol. "He's up to no good on the deserted beach with that Zhenka of his. He's making something ... something terrible."

They did indeed find Misha and Zhenka on the deserted beach. Dressed in thick sheepskin coats and fur caps, the two Yenokhins were dragging heavy rocks around in the noonday sun.

"They're crackers..." Giggle Guts whispered.

"I'm not going any closer," Borka said, stepping back and pointing at them from a safe distance. "See that? They're bonkers!" He himself hadn't expected to see them like that.

Misha began rolling a boulder in their direction, and the gang took to their heels and rushed off.

The Patrol's first instinct was to follow them, but duty demanded that they should be brave. The girl straightened the red band on her sleeve and went up to Misha, somewhat timidly. The boys also straightened their arm bands and followed their leader.

"What's the matter? Too hot?" The sweat was pouring down Misha's face. Everything seemed to be going round. He could see white spots and red fountains dancing before his eyes. "You must get used to difficulties! It won't be any easier when we set off for Tallinn, I can tell you."

"But I ... can't think anymore," Zhenka replied with difficulty. "I just can't think... That's enough!" he suddenly exclaimed loudly and began pulling off his scarf and undoing the buttons on his sheepskin coat. "It's driving me crazy!"

The Patrol came up to them.

"Are you Misha?" the girl asked bravely in a scared voice.

"Yes, so what?" The dots stopped dancing in front of Misha's eyes, and he saw the Pioneer Patrol in front of him in a daze.

"You must come with us to the police station," the girl ordered him. Looking at the other two, she twisted her finger in the air again. "I told you, they're all crackers..."

"Why?" asked Misha in surprise. He sat down heavily on a boulder. Glaring spots began dancing before his eyes again.

"You'll find out there," they told him.

"Oh, alright!" Misha exclaimed angrily.

He jumped up and suddenly swayed.

"What's the matter? Don't you feel well?" the girl asked anxiously.

"No," he said and fainted on the spot.

Zhenka gave him a pitying look and remarked casually to the astonished Patrol:

"So I'm tougher than him after all... What are you gaping at?" he suddenly shouted. "Carry him home! Or else you'll have to explain why. At the police station!"

"They're crackers"

Staggering with exhaustion the Pioneer Patrol carried Misha into the yard. Borka and his pals, who were watching through holes in the fence, exchanged satisfied glances.

The boys and the girl laid the "lifeless body" on the porch, and Borka exclaimed triumphantly:

"They've done him in! And delivered him to the doorstep!"

Aunt Klava flew out of the house.

"Oh, my goodness! What's happened to him?"

"Sunstroke," said the girl.

"Not true," said Borka rapturously. "It was a stroke ... but not from the sun."

Giggle Guts chortled. And Mum Trap nodded.

"Let's go!" said Borka. "There's nothing else to watch here."

The Patrol left too.

Aunt Klava poured a bucket of water over Misha. He came to, sat up and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" some alarmed holidaymakers asked over the fence.

"Nothing," Aunt Klava said curtly. "The boy's had too much sun."

At this point Zhenka trotted up in his fur cap and sheepskin coat, carrying Misha's heavy clothes.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Aunt Klava. "We had an earthquake from Turkey here last year, but never anything like that!"

"Did you see that?" a fat gentleman behind the fence said quietly to his equally corpulent wife who was holding their plump offspring by the hand. "The children next door are obviously unbalanced."

"Pack our suitcases, Vasya," his wife replied equally quietly. "We must think of the child."

"We're leaving too," whispered another couple with a child.

"Into the house with you! Quick march!" Aunt Klava ordered, gathering up the winter coats and caps. "Come on, Misha... I'll have a talk to you later, Zhenka. Wait till your mother and father get back! It's a good thing you didn't take the trunk!"

"I'm the toughest though!" Zhenka boasted.

In spite of all his protests, Aunt Klava put Misha straight to bed.

"You're not going out again today, young man. And you're staying at home too," she said sternly to Zhenka.

"But there's nothing wrong with me," Misha argued. "It was just an accident."

"You just lie still and don't get excited... I've told you time and time again: you must be careful with the sun!"

"Let me just go out for a walk," Misha begged.

"And me too," Zhenka chimed in.

"Certainly not." Aunt Klava stood up firmly. "I'm going to fetch the doctor."

The key turned in the lock, followed by the sound of footsteps hurrying down the steps. Misha jumped out of bed and tried the door just in case. It was well and truly locked.

"If we took a run the two of us could knock it down," Zhenka announced thoughtfully.

"Better not," Misha said. "Or they won't let us go out tomorrow either."

"Not just tomorrow but ever again," Zhenka said reflectively.

"You're pretty tough, you know. Tougher than me in the heat," Misha acknowledged.

Zhenka basked in the praise.

"I've lived in the south all my life."

"But don't worry about me, I'll get used to it," Misha assured him.

"Of course you will," Zhenka nodded. "I'll teach you."

"How?" asked Misha all agog.

"Oh, er..." Zhenka thought for a moment, then brightened up. "Somehow."

They heard voices down below.

"I do hope you don't mind, Professor. I'm asking you as a specialist, although you're on holiday here," Aunt Klava was saying to someone.

"Not at all, not at all. Delighted," an elderly voice replied cheerfully.

Misha instantly dived into bed. The steps creaked.

"It's very nice here," said the short man with grey hair, stopping on the balcony. "Like on the captain's bridge."

He shook the door handle, pressed his face to the round window and peered shortsightedly into the room.

"It seems to be locked... And there's no one in there..."

"No one in there?" Aunt Klava exclaimed. "Surely they haven't got out! I locked the door myself!"

She began to turn the key feverishly in the lock.

"They're like that... Especially that Misha. He could walk through a brick wall! And Zhenka's a little rascal too."

Zhenka laughed. Hearing his laugh, Aunt Klava calmed down and managed to unlock the door.

"This way please, Professor." She let the doctor in first. "Here they are."

The doctor was like any other doctor, except that he wasn't wearing a white coat and didn't have a red cross on his bag.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked Zhenka.

"Nothing," Zhenka replied smartly, hopping through the door onto the balcony. Zhenka was afraid of doctors.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," Aunt Klava said quickly, pointing at Misha. "It's him. He spent too long in the sun!"

"I see..." The Professor opened his bag. There was a sudden squeak from something alive in it.

Aunt Klava shuddered. Misha stood up and looked inside. The bag contained some papers, a stethoscope and a guinea pig in a cage.

"I had a guinea pig not long ago," Misha announced happily.

"Did it run away?" enquired the professor.

"No, I gave it away. To the nature club at school. Do you use it for experiments?" Misha nodded at the guinea pig.

"Yes, mutations," said the professor and sat down beside him.

They were soon chatting away gravely, having quite forgotten about Aunt Klava, while Zhenka goggled at them through the window.

"We've been working on this for more than a year now." The professor was only too pleased to tell Misha all about his experiments.

He unrolled some charts and showed them to Misha, who examined them carefully and asked questions. Aunt Klava stared at the two of them in amazement, quite at a loss. All she could hear was a constant buzzing interspersed with mysterious words like "repeated experiment ... grafting ... laboratory research..."

"What should I do now?" she said loudly. "I'm very worried!"

The professor and Misha stopped talking and looked up in surprise.

"Oh, yes," the professor suddenly remembered. "I got carried away. Sit down, please," he said to Aunt Klava.

She sat down quickly. He held her wrist and fished a watch on a chain out of his pocket. After watching the second hand for a while, he closed the watch case with a snap and wrote out a prescription.

"Take these four times a day. Goodbye... Goodbye, young fellow. Very pleased to have met you ... such a bright young fellow..." He ruminated for a moment, then smiled. "You need more fresh air." And off he went.

Aunt Klava sat glued to the chair, her mouth wide open, staring at the prescription.

Misha glanced at it.

"Valerian drops," he read. "They have a very good tranquillising effect."

"What a nice man!" Aunt Klava exclaimed. "What were you talking to him about?"

"Nucleic acids," Misha replied. "I read about them in the magazine *Knowledge Is Strength*."

"There was an article in *Izvestia* too," Aunt Klava recalled vaguely. "They're something to do with living cells, aren't they?" Then she suddenly exclaimed angrily. "Now then, outside with you. You heard what the professor said, didn't you? No lounging around indoors, like idle good-for-nothings!"

Misha was out of the room in a flash.

Aunt Klava went to the cupboard, took out a bottle and poured some Valerian drops into a spoon.

"Write that word down..."

That day they managed to get a lot done. They made friends with the watchman on the old quay and painted two window frames in his little hut with white oil paint, while he patched the roof and looked through the holes at his young helpers inside the hut. They had got to know one another very easily. The watchman had been painting the window frames, grumbling about having to do the roof and the windows and only having one pair of hands, and the hut being more like a "dragon's lair" than a place fit for a watchman. Misha and Zhenka overheard him as they were walking past.

"We'll help you if you like," Misha offered generously.

"Are you any good at it?" the watchman asked doubtfully.

"My dad and I built a garden shed all on our own in Dorokhovo, just outside Moscow!" Misha said proudly.

"Here you are then." The watchman handed him the paint tin and brush.

"Why should we?" Zhenka objected too late. "We've got enough to do as it is! What about the boat?"

"You're a silly old lazybones, Zhenka," said Misha knowingly. "If we help him, he'll help us."

"What's that?" asked the watchman, who had been about to climb onto the roof. "One good turn?"

"No," said Misha hesitantly. "But ... we did want to ask you for a few planks... From old boats that are going to be burnt in any case," he emphasised. "They may be old, but some of their parts can still be used. Like that bulwark over there, say, or those ribs. And I see you've got some oakum and bits of tar you don't need. We could make good use of them."

"Hmm..." said the watchman. "If I don't let you have them, will you still help me?"

"No," Zhenka announced with heartfelt sincerity.

Misha gave him an angry look and said firmly:

"Yes, we will help you. Since we offered to in the first place."

"Alright then, come along and help me," the watchman grinned evasively.

Zhenka nagged at Misha all the time they were helping.

"You and your offers of help... You should think what you're saying, clever bonce..."

But when they had finished and the watchman pulled an "almost new" bulwark off an old yawl and gave it to them, Zhenka said to Misha cool as a cucumber:

"And just think, you wanted to work for nothing."

Impressed by Zhenka's words of wisdom (or so Zhenka thought), the watchman gave them the rest of the paint in the tin and lent them a brush.

"If you need anything, come here." With a wipe sweep of his hand he pointed at the boat "cemetery." "We'll find it."

"But you won't make us work again, will you?" Zhenka asked.

Misha flicked his forehead, but for some reason Zhenka rubbed the back of his head.

"We'll help whenever you say," Misha assured him. "He's still little, see... That's why he..."

"That's alright," the watchman laughed. "But you must teach him, 'cos he'll grow up one day."

"Of course, I'll grow up," Zhenka exclaimed. "I won't always be this size."

And the watchman burst out laughing again.

The bulwark was pretty heavy, although it had been dried out by the sun. Misha and Zhenka hardly managed to carry the long, curved plank to their sheltered cove.

"It's too long," Misha said.

"I can see that," Zhenka replied sadly. "So why did we go to all the trouble of dragging it here?"

"We'll cut a bit off it," Misha reassured him.

"But then the curve won't be right," Zhenka sighed, muttering to himself, "all that trouble ... dragging it here".

"We'll steam it in boiling water and bend it how we like," Misha brushed him off.

"Can we really?" Zhenka exclaimed happily. "You're not kidding? Yes, we'll rebend it!"

"We'll rebend it alright!" Misha replied in the same happy voice, taking the brush and writing the code name SAITOTAL on the boat's prow in nice big letters.

That night, when Misha and Zhenka were sleeping peacefully in their beds, Borka and his pals lost no time. That afternoon Giggie Guts had followed them to

the cove when they were taking the bulwark there.

Shining the torch on the boat's name, Borka read out loudly in a lugubrious voice:

"Sai-to-tal..."

"That's a funny name!" Giggle Guts whistled.

Mum Trap nodded. The moon was reflected in his eyes. There was a tiny moon in each eye and they disappeared when he bent down to look at the boat's name.

"Funny name..." echoed Giggle Guts. "Perhaps it's Japanese or Turkish, eh?"

"We'll find out alright," Borka hissed.

"Why bother to find out, let's just make a lot of holes in it!" suggested Giggle Guts.

There was a muffled and somehow disapproving rumble from the invisible sea. The white flecks of foam could only be seen close up.

Borka climbed into the boat and shone the torch around.

"Make a lot of holes in it," he said, imitating Giggle Guts. "Misha would make a lot of holes in you, if he guessed who it was... There's plenty of time to do that."

"But what do they want a boat for?" Giggle Guts muttered.

"That's right!" Borka tapped his forehead approvingly. "That's what we've got to find out."

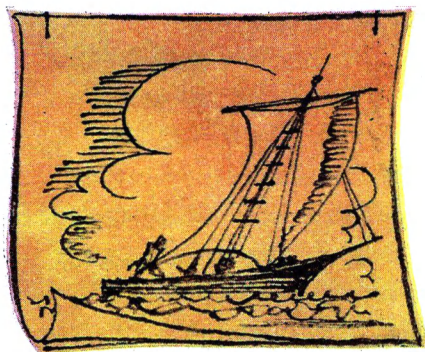
"It's obvious," said Giggle Guts calmly.

"Alright, what for?"

"To sail in," Giggle Guts retorted.

"Well, they wouldn't want to fly in it," Borka smirked. "Yes, to sail in. But where? Write that word down. We'll get to the bottom of it."

Wheezing from the effort, Giggle Guts began to write down the mysterious name on a piece of wood.



Part III

“COPY ME!”

“They’re strong and tough”

A gnarled and knobby crab, like a big friendly spider scuttled first left, then right, when the swimmer’s shadow fell upon it. It felt vulnerable on the flat sand and pretended to be a rock. Covered with tiny green tendrils of seaweed, it really did look like a stone. Another time Misha would have stopped and dived after the crab, but now he was too busy. The day before he had found a good chain for their anchor in the sea. Say he found an anchor too! Adjusting his underwater mask and clenching his teeth more firmly on the rubber mouthpiece of his snorkel, he swam off towards the old quay using his flippers. He knew he was close to it when he saw on the sea bed a mollusc-covered rail, some sharp stones not yet smoothed by the sea and a rusty pipe into which a pretty green fish darted, sending up a cloud of sand...

It grew darker, and the darkness was lit by bright beams of sunlight shining through the holes in the quay, which stood high above the sea on thick concrete supports. Around these supports flitted shining mackerel. A swarm of tiny fish flashed past like a cloud of golden dust and vanished.

“He-e-e-ey,” he heard from somewhere above him.

Misha raised his head.

“Misha-a-a-a!” Zhenka yelled with all his might, waving his hand urgently. “Hurry u-u-up!”

Misha put his head down again and swam back, frightening the fish. Some big grey mullet slid past, their spotted shining shapes disappearing slowly into the distance.

Misha took off his flippers in the water and climbed onto the shore.

“What’s up?” he said, sliding his mask onto his forehead.

"Are you blind?" Zhenka asked in an injured voice. "Look! I've brought some new members for our crew."

Only then did Misha see the two heads sticking out of the boat. Two almost identical boys got out of the boat and smiled hopefully at Misha. It was the Moshkin twins. One was clutching a large carpenter's plane to his chest, the other a lazy and very fluffy cat.

"They're strong and tough!" Zhenka said proudly of his short wiry friends. "I've known them for ages! All my life!" he added.

The Moshkin twins looked embarrassed and hung their heads.

Giving Zhenka a withering look, Misha went back into the sea without a word.

"Don't worry," Zhenka reassured the twins. "He does what I tell him. Who found him that boat? I did! Who got it towed over here? I did! I went up to the tug... Why are you standing around?" he shouted at the twins suddenly. "Let's get down to some hard work. Plane this bulwark, it's very rough."

Putting the cat down in the shade, the twins placed the bulwark between two rocks and began to smooth it swiftly with their four-handled plane.

Zhenka stroked the cat and continued his story while the Moshkins planed away and listened respectfully. Before them arose a marvellous picture, the figment of Zhenka's imagination...

The sailors were all lined up on the deck of the tug with the captain at the head. Accompanied by Misha as his adjutant, Zhenka was striding past them, up and down, hands behind his back. The men kept their eyes fixed on Zhenka, their heads moving first one way, then the other. Zhenka stopped in front of the captain, who was standing smartly to attention, took hold of his wrist and looked at his watch, because, as we know, Zhenka did not have a watch of his own and was not likely to get one in the foreseeable future.

"Stand at ease!" Zhenka commanded. "Check your watches."

The sailors hurriedly checked their watches, some setting the right time.

"To your places!" A new command rang out.

The sailors scurried off, and the captain went into the deck-house.

"Up she goes!" shouted Zhenka.

The crane lifted up their boat.

"Heave ho!" The boat was put down on the deck.

"Thank you, lads," said Zhenka, wearily.

"Hooray!" cried the sailors gaily.

"Now I would like to ask the officers to join me in the cabin for a cup of tea."

Zhenka was accompanied as before by the taciturn Misha and followed by the captain and the bosun, marching smartly as if on parade.

"Well, what a little fibber you are!" Misha's voice suddenly rang out.

They were so taken aback that Zhenka dropped the cat and the twins the plane. They had been so engrossed that they hadn't noticed Misha come up. He threw a small

piece of copper encrusted with shells on the sand and shook his head.

"Well, I never ... another Baron Munchausen!"

Zhenka drew his head into his shoulders, blinking nervously.

"I'd just managed to persuade them... Then you... They want to be sailors..."

"Please let me join your crew," they said in unison. "I want to sail to Tallinn too."

"So you've given away our secret!" Misha sighed.

Zhenka sniffed and turned away.

"Will you take us?" the Moshkins asked again.

The planed bulwark caught Misha's eye. He went up and rubbed the palm of his hand over it thoughtfully. The board was as smooth as glass.

"Where did you learn to do this?" he asked quietly.

"My dad's a cabinet-maker," the Moshkins gave a broad grin.

"See?" Zhenka chimed in.

"You know how to do it," said Misha happily, stroking the board again.

"Hey, you two!" Borka looked out from behind a derelict booth. "So that's where you are! Come over here!"

"And be quick about it!" Giggle Guts looked out behind him. Then Mum Trap popped his head out and beckoned menacingly to the Moshkins.

The Moshkins huddled together and looked at Misha beseechingly.

"Don't let us go..." they whispered. "Or they'll make us fry eggs for them, and queue up for kvass, and steal apples, and catch fish for them, and..."

"That's enough," Misha interrupted them and walked over to the booth.

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts exchanged wary glances.

"Now listen to me," Misha said calmly, stopping a few paces from the gang. "Anyone who lays a hand on them..."

"We're not touching you," Borka muttered. "What have they got to do with it?"

"I'm talking about them," Misha said. "Anyone who lays a hand on them ... will be asking for trouble," he finished.

"From them? I could finish them off single-handed!" Borka boasted with a smirk. Giggle Guts laughed and Mum Trap nodded.

"Alright then." Misha smiled and called to the Moshkins. They came up timidly.

"Don't be afraid," Zhenka called after them. "I used to be a bit scared of them myself! But I'm not at all frightened of them now."

"If you are not afraid, I'll take you to sea," Misha whispered to the Moshkins. "But I don't want cowardly sailors, do I?"

The Moshkins shifted from one foot to the other, hesitantly.

"Well?" Misha said loudly.

"I could finish them off single-handed!" Borka repeated menacingly, keeping a safe distance from Misha.

"I'll hold you to that," Misha said. "Single-handed, eh?" he asked.

"That's right," Borka laughed.

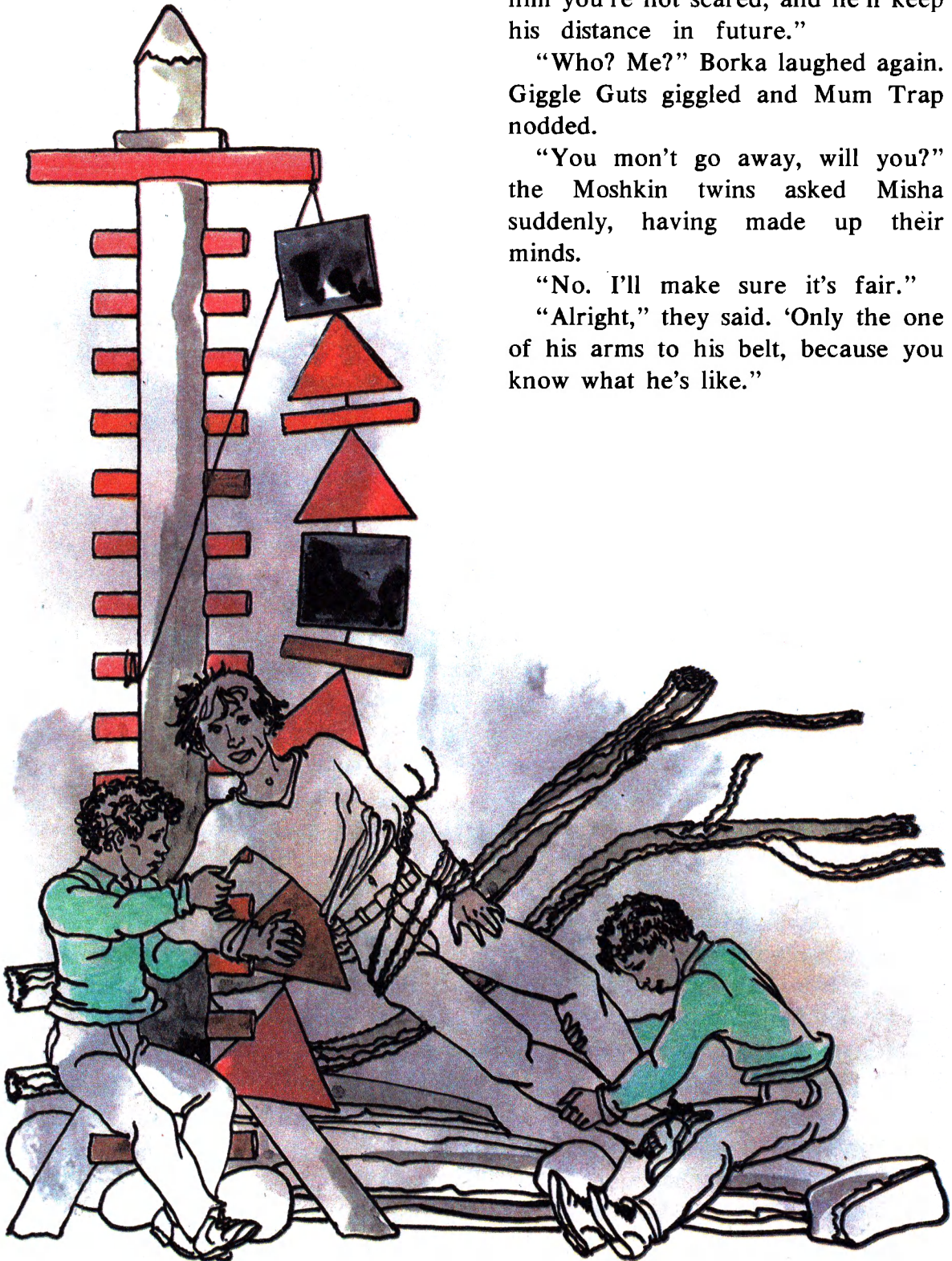
"There are two of you," Misha encouraged the twins. "You show him you're not scared, and he'll keep his distance in future."

"Who? Me?" Borka laughed again. Giggle Guts giggled and Mum Trap nodded.

"You mon't go away, will you?" the Moshkin twins asked Misha suddenly, having made up their minds.

"No. I'll make sure it's fair."

"Alright," they said. 'Only the one of his arms to his belt, because you know what he's like.'



"That's okay with me," Borka smirked.

"Get some rope, Zhenka!" Misha ordered.

Zhenka brought some rope, but did not come too close. He threw it, and Misha began to tie Borka's arm to his belt.

"The left one, not the right," Borka exclaimed unexpectedly.

"That wasn't part of the agreement," the Moshkins objected.

"Oh, alright," Borka hissed.

Misha tied the knot, jumped aside, like a referee in the ring, and cried:

"Ready!"

Borka rushed at the Moshkins and grabbed one of them by the shoulder.

"Gotcher!"

But then the second twin hurled himself at Borka's feet, and Borka went flying. Before he knew where he was, the twins were sitting on top of him, trying to twist his free arm behind his back. Borka dug his chin in the sand and jerked his legs, but could not throw them off. He couldn't even turn over on his side. The Moshkins sat firmly astride him, not letting go of his arm.

"You'll break it!" he howled. "Four arms against one! That's not fair!"

The Moshkins pushed his head down so hard that it sank into the sand.

"I'm cho-o-oking..." Borka shouted hoarsely. "C-come over he-here," he called to his mates for help, spitting out sand.

Giggle Guts and Mum Trap were about to go to him, but Misha barred the way and they went back.

"He won't let us," said Giggle Guts guiltily.

Mustering his strength Borka gave a desperate jerk ... and turned over on his back. The Moshkins pressed his shoulders to the ground.

"He's pinned down!" Misha whooped. The Moshkins let go of Borka. He jumped up furiously and raced after the twins. But they darted out of the way like Odysseus and his Argonauts in Cyclop's lair. They kept tripping him up. Borka kept falling down and jumping up again, while the Moshkins danced around him, choosing the right moment to attack, so quickly you might have thought there were four or five of them, not just two. They made Borka quite dizzy.

"That's enough!" shouted Misha.

Giggle Guts stuck out his leg to trip up one of the Moshkins who was running past, but the twin jumped over it. The second twin raced to his aid, bringing his heel up so sharply under Giggle Gut's knee that he fell to the ground, knocking Mum Trap over too.

They would have fought hammer and tongs, if Misha had not pulled out his famous test-tube refilled with "nitroglycerine."

"Give over!"

Mum Trap and Giggle Guts untied the breathless Borka's arm, while the Moshkin twins marched ferociously up and down past them.

"That's enough, didn't you hear?" Giggle Guts told the twins anxiously. "Tell them to stop, Misha."

"That's enough," Misha repeated. "The Moshkins are the winners."

"They only got me down for a minute," Borka growled, recovering his composure. "If I'd had both arms free..."

"Alright, let's try that too!" the Moshkins shouted threateningly, still thirsting for battle.

"What for?" Misha smiled. "You have a go at them now," he said, pointing at Mum Trap and Giggle Guts.

"We're ready!" the Moshkins cried.

"Come on, Borka, let's get out of here," said Giggle Guts hastily. "They've gone wild..."

"Who? Me?" the Moshkins yelled.

As if by tacit agreement Giggle Guts and Mum Trap set off for the quay. Borka stood for a while, shaking handfuls of sand from his pockets. Then he took out his handkerchief and tied another knot in it, like the one before.

"I won't forget that."

"And if you dare touch our boat," Zhenka shouted after him, "we'll come along at night and smash your houses to pieces!"

"I'm not afraid of anyone now," the Moshkin twins boasted. "I'll take anyone on." They strutted around, brandishing their fists. "Anyone at all! What about Zhenka?"

Zhenka wisely hid behind a large boulder.

"That's enough," said Misha sternly. "Now let's get down to work, sailors."

"Aye, aye, sir!" the twins shouted with delight.

"And not a word about Tallinn!" Misha warned them. "Or I won't take you!" years old, in the street. The Moshkins marched along the very middle of the pavement, puffing out their chests and throwing back their shoulders.

And the boys instinctively made way for them.

Learning to use a compass...

The building of the children's library was an old one with the date "1875" in grey plaster over the entrance. Two Atlantes supported a heavy balcony on their arms and shoulders (or "their hump" as Borka put it). The thick walls relieved the heat and, deadened the confused sounds from the street. Inside there reigned a gentle coolness and a special silence broken only by the rustle of turning pages.

Borka and his pals had ploughed their way through the Large Soviet Encyclopaedia, Brockhaus and Efron, the dictionaries of Dahl and Ushakov, and a Glossary

of Naval Terms, but nowhere under S could they find the word Saitotal.

"Excuse me, please," Borka asked the librarian politely in desperation. "Do you know how to translate the word 'Saitotal'?"

The librarian replied in a hushed voice:

"There isn't such a word. It's an abbreviation."

"What's that?" asked Borka mystified.

"How can I explain... It's a word made up of syllables from several other words. Like USSR, for example. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."

"Oh, I know all about that," Borka said, disappointed with her fund of knowledge.

"Well, if you know it, don't bother me," she hissed angrily.

So off they went empty-handed—Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts.

In the street the canvas awnings over the shop windows were flapping in the wind.

"We must keep our eyes open," Borka sighed. "Our eyes and our ears. They'll talk about it sooner or later."

Giggle Guts cackled and Mum Trap nodded.

"It's a real brain-teaser," Giggle Guts shook his head in admiration. "I haven't used my brains for almost five years, but now they've made me."

"We must keep an eye on them, lads," Borka repeated, taking one half of a pair of theatre binoculars out of his jacket.

"Let's have it," Giggle Guts asked at once.

"No," Borka said tersely. "No use wasting the binocular. I'll give you it, when we see them. Only first of all, I'll have a look through them myself."

They stopped by Zhenka's house and peered through some holes in the fence.

"No one around," said Borka, putting down the binocular.

"Give it here." Giggle Guts stretched out his hand and took a look through the binocular too.

"Clear as anything," he said, pleased. "There's no one around."

Then Mum Trap took a look through the binocular too. And nodded. Then he nodded again, pointing to the barn with the door wide open. Inside the barn were Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkins.

"Follow me," Borka ordered. They quickly climbed over the fence, crept up to the barn and pressed their ears against the wall.

"And I'll wait for you here," they heard Misha say.

Borka found a loose knot in a board, dug it out with a piece of wood and peered through the hole.

Zhenka and the Moshkins were standing in front of Misha. What was he holding? Ah, it was a piece of cardboard with some strange arrows drawn on it... For some reason Misha kept putting a compass on the cardboard.

"I'll wait for you here," he repeated, slowly and clearly. "Where this star is." He put his finger on the chart. "Okay? Did you understand all that?"

"I did," said Zhenka.

"So did I," the Moshkins echoed.

"Then repeat what I said," Misha asked Zhenka.

"Oh, well, it's like this..." Zhenka gabbled brightly. "In order to keep to the right course at sea, we must learn to follow a compass on dry land. The compass needle always points north." The Moshkins bent over the chart. "It must tally with this arrow here," Zhenka pointed at the chart. "We must go northeast following this needle. And you'll be waiting for us where this star is."

"How far is it?" the Moshkins asked.

"Oh, about five thousand metres. You can reckon about ten thousand paces," Misha said. "But don't worry about that. Just go on walking until you see me."

Borka made a sign to his pals, and they climbed back quickly over the fence into the street.

Misha ran out of the barn and disappeared through the gate. About three minutes later Zhenka and the Moshkins came out, peering at the map and the compass. Zhenka was in the middle. He was holding the map. The Moshkins had taken him by the arm and were sort of leading him along.

The northwest needle took them out of the yard and across the street. They counted their footsteps as they went.

"Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen..."

"That's interesting..." Borka drawled. "Come on, lads."

So absorbed were Misha's team-mates in what they were doing that they did not notice Borka and his pals nip past right behind them onto a piece of wasteland overgrown with dusty weeds.

"How shall we go?" Giggle Guts asked.

"We'll follow their compass," Borka replied excitedly. "And we'll count our footsteps too."

Mum Trap nodded.

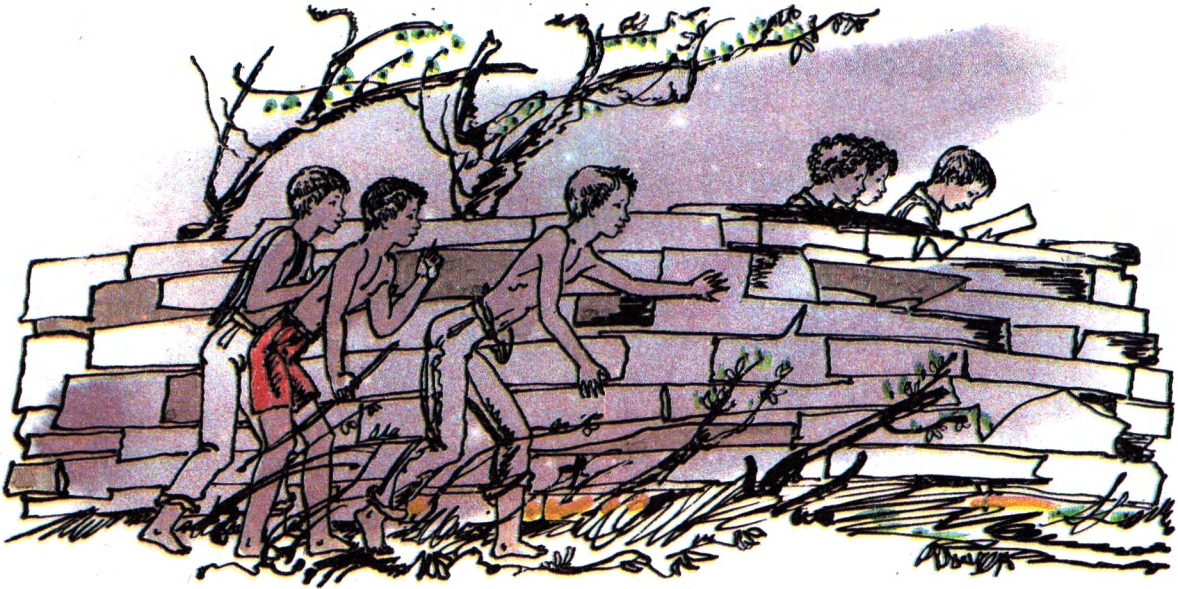
Between the street and the wasteland ran a short wall made of stones. The heads of Zhenka and the Moshkins bobbed up and down above the wall, while Borka and his pals were walking hunched up on the other side almost next to them.

"A hundred and one, a hundred and two, a hundred and three..." Zhenka and the Moshkins counted loudly.

"A hundred and one, a hundred and two, a hundred and three," Borka and Giggle Guts counted in a whisper, while Mum Trap nodded rhythmically, counting to himself. And thus they went, the two "reconnaissance" groups, divided sometimes by stone walls, sometimes by wooden fences and sometimes by rows of bushes.

"They haven't said a word about SAITOTAL," said Giggle Guts mournfully. "All they're doing is counting."

"Don't make me lose count," Borka snapped back. "One thousand two hundred and three, one thousand two hundred and four..."



But when Zhenka unexpectedly tripped over a stone, Borka burst out laughing: "Silly sausage! Fancy not noticing that," quite unaware that he himself was wading straight through a puddle.

Zhenka and the Moshkins often strayed off course, going round in circles. Several times they had to go back and start again. Mentally cursing the stupidity of their enemies, Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts, soon got tired. It was much harder for them. They had to be on the alert all the time, keep under cover, take the most difficult path and not lose sight of those "stupid nuts".

Evening came. The shadows slipped away, the sea turned grey, and lights appeared on the deck of a passing boat.

"Three thousand three hundred and eleven, three thousand three hundred and twelve..." Borka counted, pushing his way through some elder bushes in the park by the seashore and trying not to lose sight of Misha's crew. "Get a move on," he said to his two pals, puffing along behind him.

The few lamps in the park were switched on. Now it was easier to follow them. There were dark stretches between the lamps. Borka and his pals tried to hug the dark patches, when Zhenka and the Moshkins reached the lit-up ones, then tore like lightning past the next lamp.

The shining points of the compass led Misha's crew on. Zhenka and the Moshkins were so busy staring at the map and the compass that they walked straight into a high wall barring their way. It was a dead end!

"Look at that!" cried Zhenka miserably. "I'm not going any further!"

"Oh, come on! Don't give up now!" the Moshkins reasoned with him, rubbing

each other's foreheads. They looked round. A solitary lamp over the door of a closed shop lit up a pile of empty crates. The Moshkins quickly dragged the crates over and piled them up by the wall.

Still holding the map and the compass, Zhenka climbed carefully up the crates as if they were steps. The Moshkins followed close behind.

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts, who had already scaled the wall in another spot, where it was not so high, waited impatiently for the "explorers" on the other side. Suddenly there was a terrible crash, followed by banging and shouting! Borka and his pals climbed quickly up the wall with the help of the jutting stones.

"Tee-hee-hee!" Giggle Guts cackled, unable to restrain himself. "Hey, you have come a cropper!"

The pile of crates had collapsed onto the ground with Zhenka and the Moshkins floundering in the midst of them. Borka gave Giggle Guts a clip on the ear, but it was too late. Zhenka and the Moshkins looked up in horror and leapt to their feet. Zhenka grabbed the map and compass and the three of them took to their heels, racing down the avenue for dear life.

"Where are you going? It's only eight hundred and two more paces to Mishal!" Borka shouted. "Cowardly custards! Fine sailors you'll make!"

"I could have told you that straightaway!" said Giggle Guts.

Zhenka and the Moshkins would have sped right back to where they started, the barn, if an anxious Aunt Klava had not stopped them by the house.

"You should have been in bed hours ago!" That was to Zhenka. "And you're no better!" That was to the Moshkins. They hung their heads.

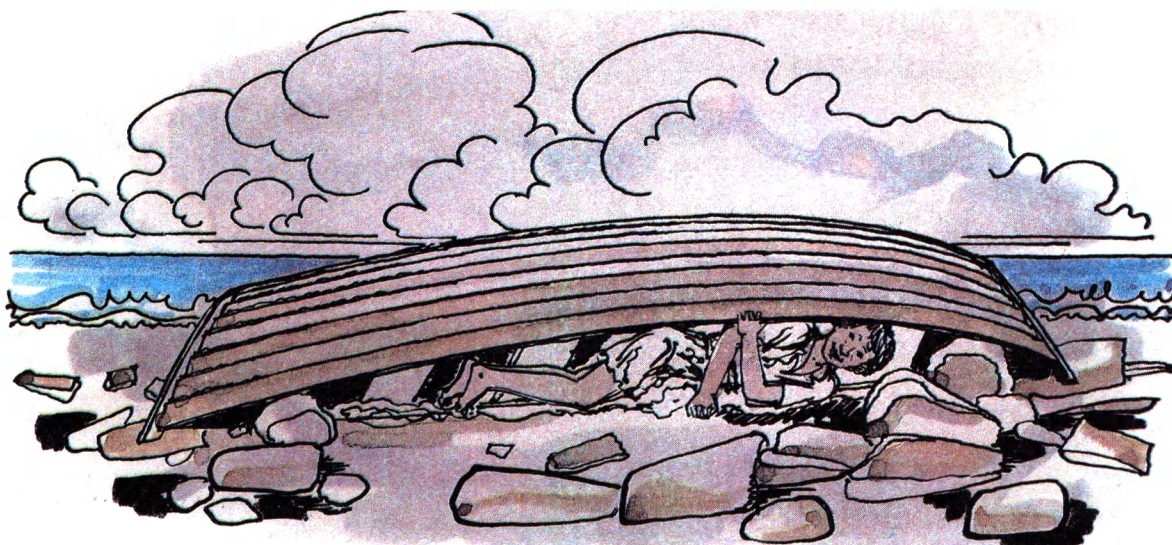
"Gena! Yura!" The twins' mother called from down the street.

"Just coming!" They hurried off.

"And where's Misha?" Aunt Klava shook Zhenka hard.

Misha was sitting sadly on a tree stump by a bridge over a stream, eight hundred and two paces from the perfidious wall, thinking angrily: "Why did I get mixed up with these toddlers? The right place for them is a nice warm cot, not the sea. They need a dummy, not a sailing boat."





Then a torch went on in the distance, and Misha's spirits rose. "Good for Zhenka!" he decided. "He had the sense to bring a torch!"

The torch grew brighter and brighter, and soon its dazzling beam swung onto Misha's face. Steps sounded on the bridge.

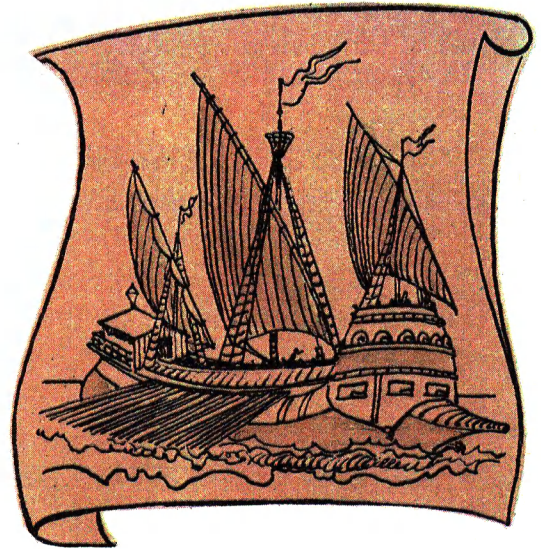
"At long last!" Misha said angrily, shielding his face with his hand. "I never thought you'd make it!"

"No, I don't suppose you did!" came the angry voice of Aunt Klava who was standing in front of him, torch in one hand and map and compass in the other.

Under the boat

Someone was playing a guitar quietly in the house and the student holidaymakers were singing softly so as not to wake up the other people in the attic and the kitchen and on the verandah, or the owners themselves who were sleeping on camp beds in a tent in the garden. With a blanket drawn up over his head, Borka listened half-asleep to the timid guitar, the singing, his father's snores and his mother's regular breathing, the murmur of the sea in the distance, the music in the park even further off, and the odd words of passers-by as they walked past the garden fence late at night. "Silly ass," he cursed himself. "Why did I get mixed up with Misha? I could spend as long as I liked following a compass, if I wanted to. I'll buy one, read about it in a book, and learn what to do. It's as easy as pie. Won't

take me a minute. And I could build a boat too and go sailing. And invent nitroglycerine. Nothing to it! This bighead from Moscow thinks he's the cat's whiskers! But where is he going to sail? It must be a long way if they're learning to use a compass. Oh, it's all a load of..." And he dropped off to sleep, reassured. He never had dreams. One day he had told his father so, and his father had praised him for it. "That means you're a healthy lad with no rubbishy thoughts in your head. You'll live to a hundred, like me." Although his father was only forty-five, he obviously meant that he was going to live to a hundred and he hoped his son would too.



But Borka awoke at daybreak (you get a better sleep outside in the fresh air) and immediately "rubbishy thoughts" about boats and compasses and Misha and all sorts of intriguing, interesting things crowded into his head. Where were they planning to sail? Could it be Sevastopol? The thought made him green with envy! They'd see the warships, the monuments and the Malakhov burial mound that he, Boris, had only seen once and that was at the cinema.

Suddenly he had an idea. He dressed quickly and ran outside before his parents woke up.

As Borka had expected, there was no one near the SAIOTOTAL. The boat was lying upside down, because Misha and his friends had started caulking the bottom the day before. Borka lifted it up and darted underneath it. He hoped to find out from eavesdropping on their conversation the meaning of the boat's name. They might easily let it out when they got talking.

He did not have to wait long, only about half an hour. Misha's crew were early risers too. Not like Giggle Guts, for example. You'd have a job waking him at ten. Mum Trap got up early though. He had to walk the dog. Otherwise he'd have slept till lunchtime too.

"I've got four hammers from the watchman and four chisels too," came Misha's voice. "Now we'll be able to get down to it properly!" He paused for a moment. "Cowardly custards, that's what you are... Running away from Borka like that! You got him down on the ground the other day!"

"Yes, but he only had one arm free then," the Moshkins said.

"Yesterday both his arms were free," Zhenka remarked. "He's stronger than them. It was just a fluke that time."

Borka smiled happily under the boat.

"And Borka might set the dog on us too," the Moshkins continued, trying to justify themselves.

"I'll give you a bravery test," Misha threatened.

"What?" the Moshkins exclaimed in alarm.

"Don't do that," Zhenka said.

"You've already tested me," the Moshkins protested.

"That wasn't a proper test. I've found a storehouse near here guarded by two ferocious dogs. There are two cables stretched across the yard. The dogs' chains slide along these cables, so they can run alongside them. But they can't reach each other, even if they try—there's a gap of half a metre. The test is for you to run along between them," Misha announced.

The Moshkins did not say a word.

"Oh, let's not do that," Zhenka said again. "My chest measurement is about forty nine centimetres, and you say the distance between the dogs is fifty!"

"We, the two of us, have got broad chests too," the Moshkins cried in unison as always.

"Well, slip through sideways," Misha advised them laughingly.

"I can't," the Moshkins wailed.

"Then get into training," Misha said, mockingly again.

"Good for him!" thought Borka respectfully.

"No, let's do this," Zhenka suggested. "We'll never be afraid again—the three of us together!" he added. "Never—only don't set us any dog tests, please."

"Dog tests?" Misha asked. "I said bravery tests... But never mind," he replented. "If you promise never to be afraid again, I'll believe you. We won't bother about the dog test. I was only joking. I believe you."

Zhenka and the Moshkins heaved a sigh of relief.

"Now let's get down to some hard work!" Misha ordered.

Immediately a great hammering and banging started right over Borka's head. Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkins were stuffing tow in the cracks and hammering away at the chisels as they caulked the bottom of the boat. There was a terrible banging and clattering inside Borka's head, as well as above it! He put his hands tightly over his ears. It was like sitting inside a huge drum. Bits of rotten wood, tar and dust were falling into his eyes and nose and down his neck. Borka crawled under the stern, but there was a lot of banging and shaking here too, although it wasn't quite so bad. The tiny pinpoints of light in the cracks on the bottom of the boat were slowly and surely being swallowed up by the darkness which was advancing towards him together with the furious sound of the hammers knocking tow into the cracks.

In the rare moments of silence, when he thought his head would burst from the deafening noise, Borka overheard a few scraps of conversation.

"Will the boat be ready soon?" asked Zhenka.

"Yes, pretty soon," Misha replied.

The hammering started again.

After a while it stopped once more. Borka strained his ears, but his head was still full of ringing hammers.

"We must find a quiet bay and sail around for a bit ... just right for SAITOTAL..."

Then came some more hammering. This time it sounded as if they were tapping out "dots" and "dashes" in the Morse code for the whole world to hear. In the pauses between the "dots" and "dashes" came the voices of the Moshkins.

"...all ... orts ... erel" they yelled. "Cap ... ay! ... oo"

"There're all sorts of bays here!" Borka reconstructed. "Captain Bay! Blue Covel"

Then they began hammering in unison again. It was enough to make your hair stand on end, and he couldn't hear anything else. If the "explorers" hadn't stopped for a swim, Borka would probably have gone deaf.

Borka climbed out from under the boat and crept up to the old quay, hiding behind boulders. His head was still full of the sound of hammering. "I hope it'll go away," he thought worriedly. The sound kept dying away, then bursting out again with renewed vigour. Borka even turned round several times to look at the boat (perhaps the sound was coming from there?), but it was quite deserted. The boys were swimming in the sea by a rock which kept disappearing under the waves, then rising up again like a swimmer who was drowning.

The hammering inside Borka's head went on almost all day. When he heard women's high heels tapping in the street, or buckets clanging, or apples falling off the trees in the garden, he shuddered. And when Giggle Guts, listening to his story, automatically began to drum his fingers on his knee, without making the slightest, but the slightest sound, Borka jumped up and yelled:

"Be quiet, can't you! You should have been there!"

Mum Trap nodded.

"And you shut up," Giggle Guts said irritably to Mum Trap who hadn't uttered a single word. "Nobody asked you."

"I didn't find out what SAITOTAL was," Borka finished. "But one thing's clear: they're going to sail round the bays."

"We must wreck it quickly," Giggle Guts announced. "Before they have the chance."

Borka looked straight through him.

"Steady on," he said, after a pause. "That boat is going to be ours."

"We'll take it away?" Giggle Guts asked excitedly.

"Yes, we'll take it away," Boris winked. "Only not just yet."

A sailing lesson: "Copy me!"

Misha was pleased. He kept grumbling at Zhenka and the Moshkins, urging them to "Get a move on!", but in his heart of hearts he was pleased as Punch. Because each day the boat looked more like a Real Boat. They had replaced both bulwarks and the rotting ribs in the middle, caulked the bottom and sides, put in rowlocks for their future oars and, the main thing, made a new transom for the stern.

"A transom is made of two oak boards, see?" Misha had explained to his crew, pointing it out. "Our transom has cracked with age," he said sadly. "With one like that the stern would fall to bits."

"Yes, it would fall to bits," his crew agreed.

Misha measured the two boards with a tape measure.

"We must find some oak boards. I thought there might be some at the boat



'cemetery', but there aren't. I've already had a look. There are plenty of other parts, but no transoms," he repeated.

The first person to help them out was their "old friend", as Zhenka liked to call the quay watchman. "But he's a new friend," Misha had once objected. To which Zhenka replied: "He's old and he's our friend. So he's our old friend." They helped the watchman again, this time to mend the gate. The Moshkins worked very hard. And then the watchman helped them, by giving them a big oak stump, big enough for three transoms!

They floated the stump in the sea to the cove where their boat was. Misha chalked the shape of the transom on the sawn end using exactly the same measurements, and the Moshkins chiselled along the lines. Then they tried to cut it with a hacksaw, but the hacksaw got stuck straightaway.

"It's too short," Zhenka said.

"This is oak! Even a two-handled saw would be no good here!" Misha said worriedly. The "explorers" sat down on the stump wondering what to do next.

"I know." The Moshkins jumped up and raced off.

They came back with a hand-cart.

"Where did you get that from?" asked Misha frowning.

"From home. It's ours," the Moshkins replied in an injured tone.

"Where are we taking it?" asked Zhenka.

"To the port," the Moshkins replied. "There's a timber sawing unit there. And they must have a saw. A circular one."

Borka and his pals, who were spying on their enemies as usual, were most surprised to see the boys hurrying off somewhere with a tree stump on a cart.

"They're up to something again," said Borka enviously.

The tree stump was soon delivered to the timber sawing base, where, as the Moshkins had rightly guessed, they were bound to have a circular saw. And there it was! Biting through thick logs with a high-pitched wail, its teeth flashing as it spat out sawdust.

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts climbed up a tree to continue their observations. Misha's crew asked the man in charge of the saw something, but he shook his head and went back to his work. The boys would not take no for an answer. They rolled the stump closer and sat down on it. The man looked round, and they gazed at him sadly. He turned away, embarrassed, to avoid looking at them. They immediately got up and moved the stump to another spot in his line of vision. The man again turned away and continued gloomily to saw the logs coming off the conveyor belt.

When he had finished sawing one log, he automatically stretched out his hand for the next. Instead of a log the conveyor brought him the oak stump. The man switched off the saw, and the noise stopped. He looked down sternly at the boys below. Now it was for them to turn away.

The saw began wailing again, and they smiled happily.

"They got what they wanted," Borka couldn't help smiling too.

When the boys put the two oak boards on the cart and waved a cheerful goodbye to the man in charge of the saw, Borka said:

"They've sawn some planks. But why?" Then he provided the answer himself. "For the boat, of course."

Giggle Guts gave a solemn frown and Mum Trap nodded.

This was not the only thing that had excited their imagination over the last few days. Borka and his pals had abandoned their former pursuits and now spent all their time observing Misha and his crew. Observing and envying, afraid to admit it to one another. From afar they saw Misha teaching the boys to twist cables, reading aloud to them from some very thick books probably about sailing, explaining and drawing things in the sand.

And as for the boat itself, it was getting newer every day, growing younger before their eyes, with its new stern and new seats, the bottom freshly painted with red lead, and the rowlocks which had been polished so hard with emery that they shone like nickel! Misha's crew kept going to the boat "cemetery" carefully selecting and taking away all sorts of parts from dumped vessels.

"Maybe I should build a boat myself?" The exciting thought had occurred to Borka several times, but he realised that he couldn't cope with such a difficult task. "I don't know enough," he confessed to himself honestly.

And to make matters worse—this really was the last blow—Misha's crew had made friends with the tugboat captain. The one who had helped Misha and Zhenka get the boat to the deserted beach. He had already visited the boys' "shipyard" twice, examined the boat carefully and made what were obviously some very useful suggestions. While he, Borka, the terror of many a seaside street, had to watch it all at a distance, hiding away with his gormless mates, instead of building a real boat himself and making friends with a tugboat captain.

"Why isn't my dad a captain?" Borka asked himself a question which thousands of other boys all over the world probably ask themselves too. "Zhenka's dad is a captain, and now they've got hold of another one! Never mind, my Dad's not a captain, but what's to stop a captain being friends with me? I'm as good as any old Misha! I can read the right books and learn all about sailing if I want to. There's nothing to it!"

He may have wanted to, but when it actually came to it... The days flashed by in a kind of void, and he never got further than wanting. They all stayed where they were: Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkins with the boat, and Borka, Giggle Guts and Mum Trap hiding behind a rock or a fence so they could watch what was going on. Like yesterday, for example! What had they seen then?

The captain of the tugboat again visited the boys' "shipyard", had a word with them, and then they split into two groups. Zhenka and the Moshkins hurried off

to the town, while Misha and the captain went to the port. Borka wanted to send his two pals after Zhenka and the twins, and follow the captain and Misha himself. But his pals protested. It was much more fun to follow the captain and Misha. Borka would have punished them for this insubordination, but he was afraid of losing Misha.

"I won't forget that," he showed Mum Trap and Giggle Guts two clenched fists, one for each of them, and hurried off to the port.

The captain and Misha had stopped by the Yacht Club. This was an old disused boat with brightly coloured sports flags, moored to an iron landing stage on concrete supports. Car wheelbases hung on the side of the boat so that it did not bump against the landing stage. Nearby in a slipway behind a green fence were big yachts and small centreboard boats. Borka had known for a long time that these centreboard boats with the blunt bow and stern were called Optimist. It was a special class of yacht. And the word "optimist", as someone who knew had once explained to Borka, meant "a brave, cheerful person." It was a good name, because only brave, cheerful people would dare to go to sea in a frail craft like that, no bigger than an ordinary bath. There had never been any boats like that in the town, until the Yacht Club had acquired a few centreboard boats about a month ago. They were going to open a Young Pioneer Section, but the notice hadn't gone up yet. Borka had tried to find out all about it, and they had told him flat: you could only use the boats if you joined the Section and got top marks in the training sessions. And in any case that would only be next summer, at the earliest. This year all they might organise was lessons on the theory.

He was really fed up. It would have been better if they'd never got those smashing boats because he, Borka, with the sort of marks he got at school, would never be allowed to sail in them. So all he could do was admire these beautiful yachts with their shining glossy paint helplessly from afar.

Smooth rails ran down the slipway into the water. An electric trolley could send any yacht straight into the water. And there in the vast expanse of sea and sun, you could spread your sail's wing and fly ... if you knew how, that is.

The captain had a word with the man on duty who then brought out a short mast with a furled sail. Misha helped to set it up, got into the centreboard boat, which was on a special trolley, and slid down the rails into the sea. The trolley disappeared under the water, setting free the Optimist, which bobbed about on the waves with Misha in it!

Without wasting a moment Misha unfurled the sail and tightened the sheets. With the wind in its sail the boat set off along the coast.

"He's tacking starboard," the man on duty said approvingly to the captain. He pressed the switch and the trolley slid up out of the water on the rails. "He can come here any time he likes in that case."

Borka nearly howled with sheer spite. There wasn't a hope of him, a native of

the town, who'd lived there all his life, being allowed to join the Yacht Club, on account of his behaviour, poor school work, and the rest of it. But this holidaymaker was being let in without a murmur!

"He's a champion," the captain said briefly, watching the boat sail into the distance.

Then Borka remembered angrily that Misha was the Moscow champion, judging from that photo of him with the "fists" in Zhenka's magazine, and this infuriated him more than ever.

The sail was a long way from the shore now, racing in the direction of the boys' "shipyard".

The captain said goodbye to the man on duty and walked off in the same direction.

Borka winked at Mum Trap and Giggle Guts, and they set off after the captain pretending it was on their way.

They had to stop just before the "shipyard". The captain had climbed onto a rock next to the SAITOTAL and, although he was watching Misha's sail, he might have noticed them if he had suddenly looked round. And Borka did not want the captain to guess that they were spying. Who would want that?

So they skirted the deserted beach and hid behind a pile of rocks some distance from the captain. Misha's centreboard boat was close to the shore now. Suddenly the three observers saw the captain striding towards the spot where they were hiding.

Frantically pushing and shoving, Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts scrambled to another pile of rocks and hid behind it. When they peeped out cautiously, the captain was standing on the rocks over their first hiding-place looking out to sea.

From their new place Borka and his pals could not even see the shore, only the sail of Misha's boat, which seemed to be gliding along at the captain's feet. Shading his eyes with his hand, he was looking somewhere to the left of the sail. Suddenly Borka saw another sail behind the cliff, a big square sail on a tall mast and three heads which belonged to Zhenka and the Moshkin twins. The mast was swaying, the sail flapping wildly, and they were pulling at the sheets. Misha sailed closer to them and shouted:

"Copy me!"

The wind carried his voice so loudly that he seemed to be very close, just a few metres away.

"Where did they get that yacht?" muttered Giggle Guts. Mum Trap nodded.

Misha was tacking to show how manoeuvrable the boat was and at the same time shouting instructions:

"Go about! This is how you do it! This is a starboard tack! And this is a port tack! Just copy me!"

Zhenka and the Moshkins were struggling with the sail, pulling the sheets in opposite directions.

"Perhaps they've got a raft, eh?" Borka asked.

"When could they have made it? We would have known!" Giggle Guts said. "They must have a yacht! But whose is it? Where did they get it?"

Suddenly a sharp gust of wind sent the Moshkins' mast keeling over. The sail fell right on top of them.

"Shipwreck!" shouted Borka, jumping up. "Help!"

The captain turned round with a start.

The Moshkins were rolling about on the beach under a huge white double sheet with a hole on one side for a blanket tied to a clothes-line pole. The wind was trying to blow up the sheet like a balloon through the hole. Misha was close to the shore now, his prow cutting into the waves.

"Ha-ha-ha!" Borka and Giggle Guts roared with laughter, holding their sides, while Mum Trap slapped his bare stomach with delight.

Zhenka and Moshkins struggled out of double sheet at last and once again they began to right the sail.

"And you want us to take the boat away," Giggle Guts said to Borka. "They've capsized even on dry land."

"Steady on," Borka replied. "First we must worm our way in!"

"To their confidence?" Giggle Guts brightened up.

"Where else?" Borka asked with a meaningful click of his fingers.

"I would never have agreed if..."

One fine day when the sea was rough and the waves were white-capped far out at sea, Misha and Zhenka were hammering away in their "shipyard". The sound of the sea was so loud that they did not hear the captain arrive.

"Here's Neptune to help you!" he greeted them.

"Hello, Captain," the boys shouted joyfully.

"Not bad." The captain walked round the boat.

"It's good!" exclaimed Zhenka, admiring his work and for some reason giving the captain an anxious look.

Zhenka was right...

"So you're thinking of sailing to Tallinn, eh?" the captain suddenly asked Misha. Misha turned to Zhenka who avoided his eyes.

"Traitor!" Misha shouted angrily.

The captain placed a big hand on his shoulder.

"No, he's not traitor. He just asked my advice as one sailor with another. And

you know, brother captain..." He actually called him "brother captain", and Misha blushed with pleasure. "Zhenka had some serious doubts about your plan."

"So you think we won't manage it, eh?" Misha asked in an injured voice.

"You may be able to manage it, but the point is will your parents let you go?"

Misha said nothing.

"I see," the captain nodded. "So you were going without asking them? That's a pretty kettle of fish. I remember hiding away in the hold of a fishing boat when I was nine."

"What happened?" asked Zhenka, his eyes round as saucers.

"They sent me ashore," the captain replied gaily. "And gave me a good hiding on the beach. I'm telling you this for a good reason," he said, seriously. "You think you've got everything worked out. But you'll be turned back at the very first lock on the Volga-Don Canal. Who are you? Where's your licence? What's your destination?"

Misha maintained a gloomy silence.

"Just think of all the shipping there is on the Volga!" said the captain. "If everyone, or even just people like you, say, were to start sailing along it, half the boats would end up on a sandbank."

"But we'll sail in the daytime," Misha mumbled. "And if we do sail at night we'll light the top lights on the mast."

"A lot of good that will do," muttered the captain. "Now, listen, I have a suggestion."

Misha gave him a mistrustful look.

"We'll go together. You and me. I know Zhenka's dad pretty well. I'm sure he won't say no."

"But it's no fun like that. We wanted to do it on our own," Misha said miserably, although Zhenka kept hissing, "Say yes!"

"You don't understand what I mean, Captain. We'll take our yacht. And follow in your wake."

"Oh, that's alright," Misha brightened up. "So we will be on our own, eh? And you too?"

"Of course. Only we'll go through the locks together and moor at the same places."

"And you won't change your mind?" Misha frowned.

"If I haven't changed my mind now, I won't in a year's time. Firstly, you'll all be older then, secondly, you'll be more experienced. And thirdly..."

"And thirdly," Zhenka chimed in excitedly, "don't take my Mum with you! She'd make me go in your boat!"

"I promise," the captain smiled. "I'll try."

"You promise or you'll try?" Zhenka persisted.

"I promise to try," the captain answered.

"I don't know..." Misha sighed.

"Have you heard about the voyage of the 'Ra'?" the captain suddenly asked.
"I've not only heard about it, I saw it on television," Misha said. "What about it?"
"They had a portable radio transmitter, didn't they?"
"Yes, they did."

"Well, you can think of us as your radio transmitter, just in case. It can be pretty rough in the Sea of Azov and on the Volga, to say nothing of Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland. If you need to send a SOS, we'll be right behind you. It's not you I'm worried about, it's your crew," the captain emphasised.

"Alright," Misha heaved another sigh. "I would never have agreed if..." He stopped short.

"If what?" the captain asked.

"If I didn't think they might send us back and not let us through the locks."

"If you don't plan for everything, you're a bad captain."

"He'll try to be a good one," Zhenka chimed in hurriedly.

"Goodbye for now," said the captain, shaking hands with them.

"I'm not a traitor, am I?" Zhenka asked.

"You're not a traitor, you're a big-mouth," said Misha. "But perhaps it's all for the best... Time will tell."

Borka's unsporting dreams

"They let us join their crew," Borka indulged in a flight of fantasy. "We build the boat together. Misha teaches us how to sail..." "He'll be sorry," Giggle Guts chortled. "And then..." Borka continued, "we take over the boat..."

Oh, those daydreams! Borka's imagination painted the most alluring pictures. The boat, or rather the elegant brigantine, casts off from the shore. Borka is standing at the helm, Misha is plotting a course on the map, Zhenka and the Moshkins are mopping down the deck, and Mum Trap and Giggle Guts are on the look-out—except that they are looking backwards, instead of forwards. Borka signals to them. Quick as a flash Mum Trap and Giggle Guts dive into the deck-house and reappear each wearing a pirate's cocked hat and hunting boots and holding antiquated flint-locks in their hands.

Borka is transformed as well! Wearing a hat with a flaming red feather, a black patch over his right eye (no, better make it his left one) and with three flint-locks at his belt, he is brandishing a curved boarding sabre.

"Mutiny!" he cries in a gallant voice. "Throw them all overboard!"

Sticking his sabre into the deck, he flings a lasso over the trembling Misha. One tug and Misha is lying at his feet. One-two-three! Misha is bound tightly from head to foot with the lasso. Four-five! Borka pushes aside the coils of rope with his

steely fingers and takes Misha's precious test-tube of nitroglycerine. The flask sails far out to sea. There is a deafening explosion. Startled Black Sea sharks shot up to the surface.

The Moshkins recover and pull the axes off the fire-fighting unit. Bang! Bang! Deadly accurate shots fired by Mum Trap and Giggle Guts send the axes flying out of the hands of the bloodthirsty twins. Zhenka also recovers and grabs a double-barrelled hunting rifle from a secret hiding-place. Bang! A single deafening shot from Borka shatters the barrels. "Have mercy!" Zhenka and the Moshkins cry, falling onto their knees. "We won't do it again!" Tears stream down their cheeks.

"Overboard with them!" cries Borka again. He slashes the lasso around Misha deftly with his sabre. "Otherwise he'll drown."

Giggle Guts and Mum Trap push Zhenka and Misha overboard. (It's not far to the shore—they'll swim it!) The Moshkins quake with fear as Borka strides purposefully towards them, thumbs in his belt—and jump overboard themselves. (No, better leave the Moshkins on board!)

"Grab this!" Borka orders, throwing them a rope.

The Moshkins obediently scrambled up it back on board. (They will do the hard work!)

The Moshkins get busy with the sails while Borka and his pals lounge around comfortably in deck chairs, sunbathing, sipping lemonade and studying the course plotted by Misha on the map. (An arrow points to a desert island, an atoll discovered first by pirates and then by Misha, who unearthed the map in a Moscow library—fools have all the luck! Where else could he have been planning to sail, if not to a pirates' atoll in a secret lagoon?)

A month or so later...

"Land ahead!" Mum Trap speaks for the first time ever when he sees a palm-covered atoll from the look-out.

They cast anchor (or, rather, the Moshkins cast it, because it's a heavy one) in the lagoon. The cannon fires a salute! (If they manage to pinch it from the courtyard of the local museum, where it is rusting away to no purpose at all!) And then they set foot on dry land. Hooray!

The atoll is inhabited by giant tortoises, robber crabs and wild pigs originally brought there by pirates. There's not a single school on it!

"There are two ruins there," said Borka, telling his pals about the dream later. "One is an old fort with deep cellars and an underground passage. The other is a hut surrounded by a stockade, like in the film *Treasure Island*! How about that!"

"Fantastic!" exclaimed Giggle Guts excitedly, and Mum Trap nodded happily.

"We won't find any treasure there, of course," Borka continued. "I must be honest with you. Except for the things in the hut, that is. A pile of pirates' weapons, sabres, swords with hilts studded with diamonds, emeralds and plexiglass! Old

sabres, swords with hilts studded with diamonds, emeralds and plexiglass! Old barrels in the fort cellars! With the most delicious vintage lemonade and with raspberry fizz!”

Giggle Guts and Mum Trap lapsed into a dreamy silence. Eat as many wild grapes as you liked, three times the usual size, drink a cocktail of lemonade, raspberry fizz, and delicious Hungarian mixed fruit compote from precious goblets, and play dominoes to your heart’s content. That was the life!

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts sat on the sand behind a pile of rocks staring blissfully at one another with unseeing eyes.

“What about Fantomas?” Giggle Guts asked, looking at Mum Trap.

“We’ll take him with us,” Borka said, coming down to earth. “He’ll have a bone as big as this!” and he stretched out his arms as far as they would go.

Borka and Giggle Guts said nothing for a while. Mum Trap was also silent. When he wanted to say something his eyes, his whole face looked as if he was talking. You could sense it straightaway. He never opened his mouth in school either. He was that sort of person, said the psychiatrists to whom he was taken by his parents, both great talkers themselves. In school he answered all the teachers’ questions in writing only. On all subjects. And since he made lots of mistakes, putting commas in the wrong place and writing “equils” instead of “equals”, he always ended up with the lowest mark. As a young child he had been frightened by a big dog, and ever since then he had not wanted to speak. He was so afraid of stuttering that he dared not say a word. And no one could make him. The boys thought he was clever because he kept quiet all the time, and he was actually quite bright. When his parents took the doctor’s advice and bought him a big dog in the hope that this would cure him (like cures like), he managed to train it without a single word, so that it obeyed the slightest twitch of his eyebrows—not everyone could do that!

“And then we’ll sail to Captain Bay and Blue Cove,” Borka said sadly, looking at the rough sea. “Or some other bay...” He remembered the conversation overheard under the boat.

“And then what?” Giggle Guts asked. Mum Trap nodded.

“Then nothing!” Borka said angrily. “We can play dominoes here too.”

“Then why do they want to sail to a lagoon?” Giggle Guts persisted.

“How on earth do I know! They’ve got some special reason, it’s not just for fun. Copy me, see?” Borka said sarcastically.

He suddenly realised that Misha was not planning to sail to a pirates’ lagoon. Where would you find lagoons and atolls in the Black Sea anyway?

All that day Borka wondered what they could do to make Misha and his friends take them into their crew.

“I’ve got it!” he announced that evening to his pals in Mum Trap’s yard. “We’ll give them a scare, then rescue them! After that Misha will trust us a hundred per cent.”

“But how will we scare them?” Giggle Guts asked.

"It's a cinch. We wait until Misha goes out in the evening, then you and Mum Trap creep up wearing masks and pop him into a sack. 'Help! Help!' he cries. And that's when I turn up. I clobber you first, then you! 'Ouch!' you cry and off you run. Then Misha shakes my hand. 'I'll never forget that,' he says. 'As long as I live. Come round tomorrow, at 7.00 a.m.'"

"It's all very well for you," Giggle Guts complained. "I get clobbered and he gets clobbered, but what about you?"

Mum Trap nodded miserably.

"I won't hit you hard, just a trap," Borka said.

"You might not hit us hard," Giggle Guts said doubtfully. "But Misha will alright. And we'll be lucky if he just clobbers us, instead of bashing us on the head with that bottle of explosive nitroglycerine or whatever it is!"

"He won't have time," Borka argued uncertainly. "You give it to him..."

"And then he gives it to us!" cried Giggle Guts. "No thanks."

Mum Trap took a notebook out of his pocket and wrote: "Count me out."

"But how are we going to scare him, then rescue him?" asked Borka.

"It's a cinch," Giggle Guts replied. "You attack him wearing a mask, and we save him!"

"Agreed," Mum Trap scribbled quickly in his notebook.

"Thanks very much," cried Borka angrily. "You don't fancy it, but it's alright for me... A bash on the head with a test-tube!"

His eyes alighted on Fantomas the dog who was busy chasing sparrows round the yard.

"We'll set the dog on him, then rescue him!" Borka exclaimed. "How about that?" Then he answered himself: "Brilliant!"

"They'd let us join straightaway!" Giggle Guts exclaimed. But then he said miserably: "No. Misha knows the dog. He'd guess what we were up to."

"No, he won't," Borka announced cheerfully. "Not if we do this..."

The pals listened with bated breath to what they were to do. Giggle Guts cackled delightedly and Mum Trap "said" silently that the plan was brilliant, slapping his stomach with admiration. Then he suddenly went quiet, stroked his Fantomas sadly and wrote in his notebook: "It's a pity. Perhaps we don't need to?"

"Yes, we do," Borka said. "Nothing will happen to your dog. Its hair won't fall out. Let's get on with it, lads!"

They set off for a shop that sold perfume and other cosmetics. There were lots of advertisements in the window. One of them showed a smiling girl. The wind had lifted her long hair into what looked like two wings. On the right her hair was jet black and on the left it was white as snow. Two beams in the form of brushes radiated from a box with the name Londacolor written on it, like the sun in the sky. This was to show how easy it was to dye your hair!

"Perhaps we don't need to?" Mum Trap wrote again in his notebook.

“Yes, we do,” Borka repeated.

They went into the shop and bought a box of Londacolor. Fantomas, who had been left outside, watched them suspiciously through the window, as if he sensed that something unpleasant was about to happen. Dogs are very sensitive to their owner's moods. And Mum Trap's mood was pretty rotten, as any person who looked at him could see, to say nothing of a dog.

Fantomas' worst fears were justified when, some thirty minutes later in a secluded spot behind the old quay, Borka opened the box and shook the powder into a bowl of water. Giggle Guts began to mix it with a big decorator's brush, while Mum Trap held the dog by the collar. Not daring to bark at his master, Fantomas growled quietly at Borka and Giggle Guts. He was clearly not at all happy about what awaited him.

“They'll stutter for the rest of their lives,” cackled Giggle Guts, stopping short when he looked at Mum Trap. “Don't worry, I was only joking. We'll rescue them when they clamber up a tree with fright.”

After working on the boat Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkins usually came home along a narrow lane which ran alongside a babbling brook. The water in the brook was so cold that it never warmed up, although it ran a long way down to the sea. So it was nice walking along the lane on a hot evening. There was always a cool breeze there, like you get from a fan in an open refrigerator.

“There are plenty of boards around,” chattered Zhenka. “But where are we going to get a sail?”

At that moment a huge white animal with big red jaws jumped out at them. “Grrr!” it growled at the top of its voice. Thick white drops rolled off it onto the ground, and its paws left white footprints.

Mum Trap jumped out after it, but there was no one left to “rescue”. The prospective candidates had leapt over a fence for dear life. But they needn't have, for Fantomas had his own business to attend to. He dived into the brook with a splash, and the water round him turned white.

Borka and Giggle Guts poked their heads out. Catching sight of them, Fantomas leapt out of the brook, round Mum Trap who had spread out his arms to stop him, and raced towards his “torturers”. Howling with fright they sped down the lane and scrambled up a tree at an incredible pace. The slender young lime tree creaked and swayed under their weight. Fantomas raced round and round the tree, baring his fangs. Yelping furiously, he jumped up and down and clawed off long strips of bark. With a cracking of branches, Borka and Giggle Guts climbed up higher.

“Help!” they howled.

Mum Trap ran up, looked at his dog and nodded. Hanging his head with shame, Fantomas nodded too and sat down at his master's feet. Mum Trap pulled out his notebook, wrote in big letters “Climb down” and showed it to Borka and Giggle Guts.

“Not on your life,” they replied in unison.

A training session: "How to weather a storm"

"It was mad," said Zhenka, when they had got their breath back. "A mad leopard. Did you see the foam pouring down it?"

"It must have been mad," said the Moshkins. "I've never seen such a terrible animal before."

"But where could a leopard come from?" Misha objected hesitantly.

"Where? Probably from the mountains," said Zhenka, licking his dry lips.

"What does it want in the town?" Misha asked. "Why did it come here?"

"I told you, because it's mad," Zhenka cut him short. "A mad leopard."

"Perhaps it was a snow leopard?" Misha muttered.

"Could have been," Zhenka agreed. "A mad snow leopard."

"Well, I don't think it was any sort of leopard," Misha said slowly. "It looked like a dog to me. A big fierce dog."

"A big fierce mad dog," Zhenka added. "But no dogs are as big as that."

"What about Mum Trap's?" Misha retorted.

"Mum Trap's!" the Moshkins laughed. "Why, his dog is the size of a big calf, but that was the size of a small bull!"

"Shall we go and take a look?" Misha suggested.

The "captain" was ashamed of taking fright in front of his "crew".

"Not now," the Moshkins said hastily. "Tomorrow. I feel tired."

"So do I," squeaked Zhenka. "You go on your own. Don't worry about us."

But Misha didn't go either. Perhaps because he didn't want to "worry" about them.

That night Misha and Zhenka argued for a long time about the dog-cum-snow-leopard, until Aunt Klava banged on the wall downstairs.

"A mad snow leopard is nothing, although it can scare you," Zhenka whispered. "But you know what I'm afraid of most of all? A storm. When it starts tossing you about."

"Are the Moshkins afraid of storms too?" Misha asked sternly.

"Even more than me," Zhenka replied. "Will there be lots of storms on our journey? Two or even three?"

"Three hundred and three! Particularly on Lake Ladoga," Misha laughed and then said seriously: "Tomorrow I'll arrange a storm test for you. It's a good thing you told me."

Zhenka said nothing and turned over in bed.

"Misha, hey, Misha..."

"What is it?" Misha asked sleepily.

"Let's pretend I never told you that ... about the storm. Okay? Then we won't need to have a test, will we?"

But Misha did not reply. He was already asleep.

"Why did I have to go and blab that?" Zhenka said angrily to himself. Then he got angry with Misha. "He's as pleased as punch. He won't forget it."

Zhenka hoped that even if Misha didn't forget, he would at least change his mind. But next morning to make matters worse the sea was all rough and stormy. You could see that even from the window. The big waves were crashing against the shore with a nasty roar. Sensibly enough Zhenka did not remind Misha about the "storm test", but Misha remembered straightaway.

"Ha ... it's stormy," he said. "Isn't it?"

"Let's not," Zhenka burst out.

"We must... What's the wind force, do you think?"

"Force eight!" Zhenka said quickly. "Or nine!"

"Five at the very most," said Misha. "Not very strong... What a pity... Never mind, we'll think up something stronger. I've got an idea."

Zhenka inwardly cursed this idea, whatever it was.

They went for the Moshkins, then Misha led them all down to the sea. The twins walked listlessly, casting baleful looks at the stormy sea. Zhenka had whispered to them about the test on the way. He thought it was better for the three of them to be afraid together. You feel a bit braver than when you are on your own. The Moshkins started talking in horrified voices as if to Zhenka, but really they were trying to scare their "captain".

"Look how rough the sea is! All the boats have come in! They're not allowed out to sea today! And there's no swimming either! Look how rough it is."

Misha gave them a puzzled look, then the light dawned and he said to Zhenka: "Ah... So they already know."

But for some reason he took them not to the sea, but to the old quay and the watchman. The Moshkins and Zhenka brightened up at once.

"Of course," Zhenka smiled ingratiatingly at Misha. "You're quite right. We'll get some boards and nails. You couldn't have a test in rough weather like this! Gale force ten!"

"Wishful thinking," Misha said to him affectionately. Greeting the watchman, he asked whether he had any old disused barrels.

The watchman said he had plenty. He was used to the boys' strange requests by now.

"I rolled them into the gully behind that fence," he pointed. "There's a whole pile down there."

"The gully!" Misha exclaimed happily, adding mysteriously: "It's good that we don't have to look for a gully."

"There are plenty of gullies round here." Zhenka couldn't think why they needed a gully.

The boys skirted the quay and came to a deep steep gully. The opposite slope of the gully was much lower than the one on their side. There were lots of barrels

at the bottom, some falling to pieces, others apparently still intact.

"That's fine." Misha spoke more sternly now. "We'll each get a barrel, climb into it and roll down! That's worse than any old storm at sea."

"I'm scared," the Moshkins quaked.

"So am I," Zhenka piped up. "Even if I do get into a barrel, I wouldn't dare roll down! I'll just sit inside it!"

"Don't worry, we'll push you," Misha reassured him.

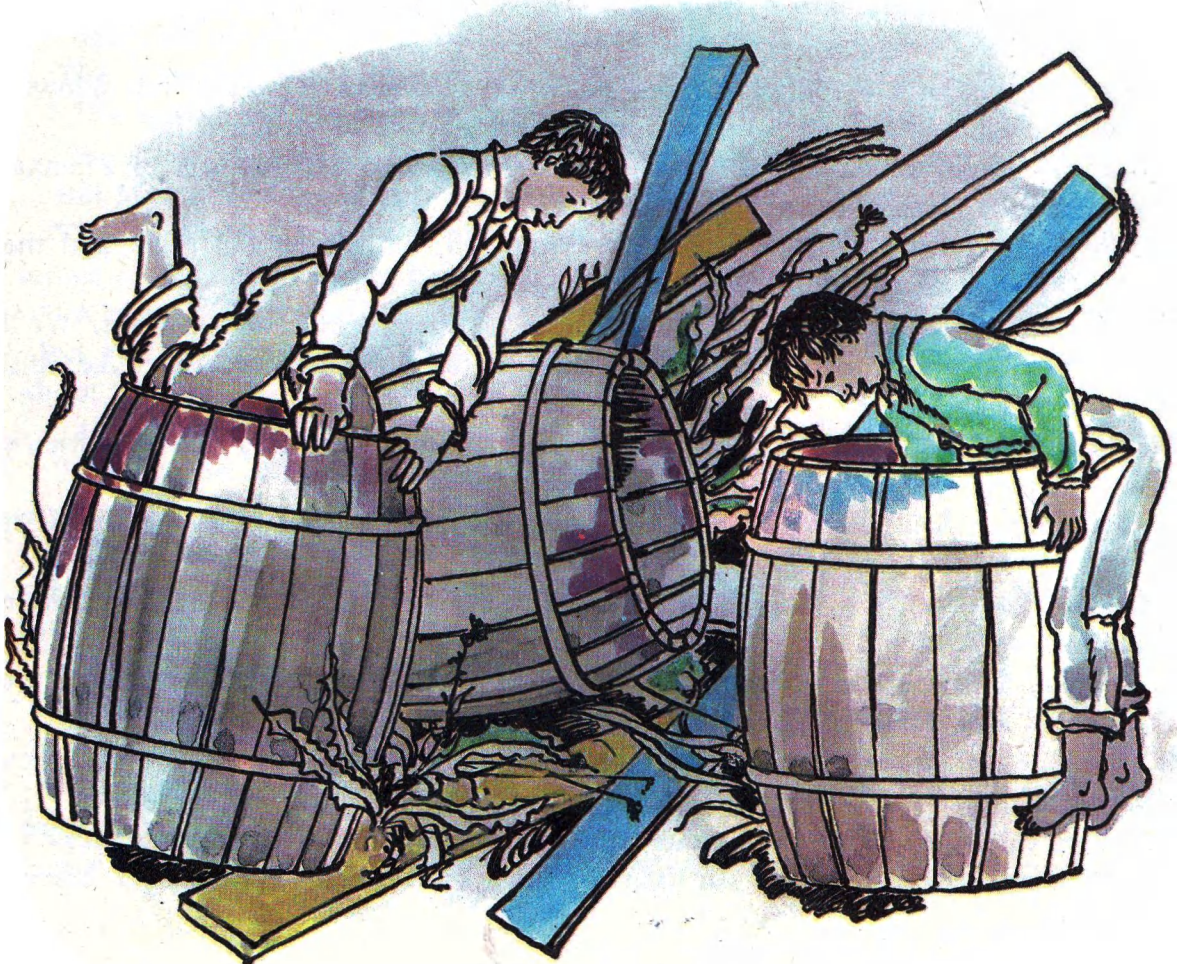
"I'm scared," the Moshkins said again, stepping back from the edge of the gully.

"It'll be worse on the boat," Misha frowned. "If you get used to it here, you'll be able to put up with it there. Don't be cowards. People have rolled over the Niagara Falls in barrels, you know!"

"Well, the Niagara Falls is one thing," Zhenka wailed. "But look how far down it is here!"

"I'll have you laid up ashore," Misha threatened.

Hiding in the thick bushes on the other side of the gully, the ever-present Borka,



Mum Trap and Giggle Guts tried in vain to work out what was going on. Misha's crew was clearing the bottom of the gully, rolling the barrels up to the top and removing rocks, stones and bits of metal and wood from the slopes.

Soon there was a row of four barrels standing on their sides by the edge of the gully.

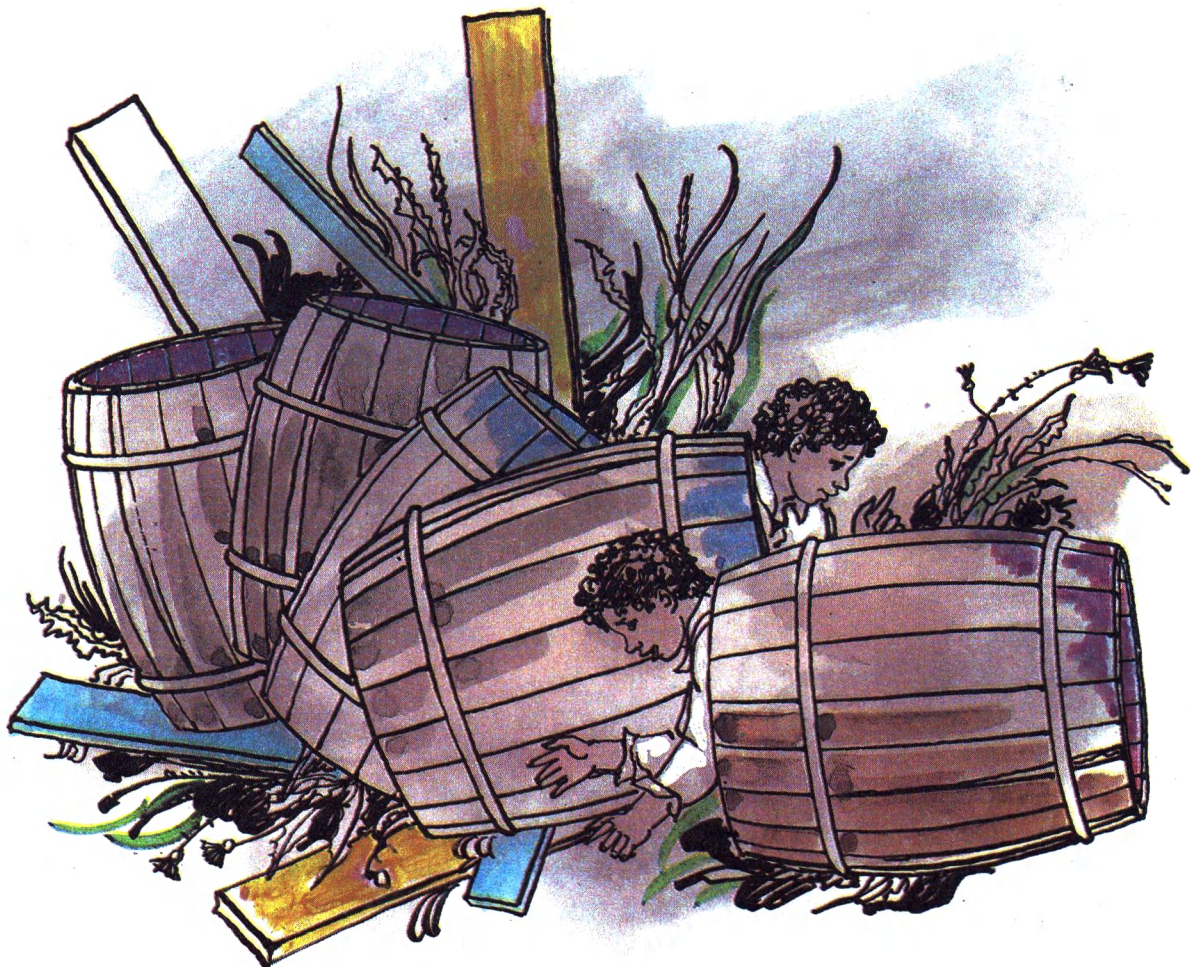
Misha climbed into one of them.

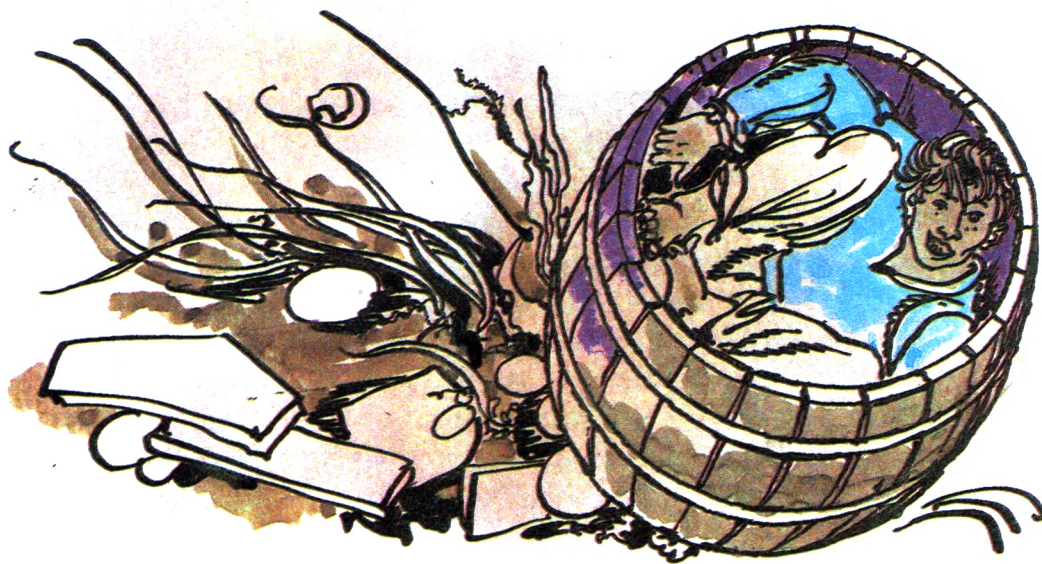
"Push me," he said in a hollow voice. "Come on. You heard what I said."

The Moshkins gave a push, and the barrel careered down with much bumping and rattling. It stopped in a big elder bush at the bottom, and Misha climbed out unsteadily. He sat down and shook his head with a dazed expression.

"It tosses you about alright! Much worse than a storm!" he shouted gaily, when he came to. "Come on, Zhenka! It's your turn now."

Zhenka did not dare to roll down straightaway. He climbed down the slope, carefully examining the path he was about to take.





“He’s calculating,” said Borka respectfully.

Zhenka removed a small pebble from the path. Then he climbed up again, hesitated for a moment, looked askance at the Moshkins, and climbed reluctantly into the barrel. The Moshkins gave it a push and it flew down, resounding with Zhenka’s frantic shouts. Misha barely had time to jump out of the way.

Zhenka climbed out, gasping and sobbing, and began to pat himself all over.

A third barrel rocketed down. It was going very fast and bumping wildly. With a final bump it landed on the bottom of the gully and bang, crash ... fell to pieces! There was a pile of hoops and boards, but no one to be seen!

Misha and Zhenka exchanged worried glances. Then a fourth barrel came rolling down. The Moshkins must have sent the third one down to test it. It had bumped so high because it was empty.

The fourth barrel whizzed past Zhenka and Misha at a great speed. It was going so fast that it even rolled up the low slope opposite, not stopping until it reached the top. Out of the barrel on all fours crawled both Moshkin twins. They looked down in amazement, not realising how they could be at the top. As if they had not made that break-neck descent after all.

“Oo-oo-ouch!” they groaned.

“They’re crackers,” Giggle Guts said to Borka and Mum Trap in the bushes.

“Good lads!” Misha praised his “seafarers”. And his crew limped away after him, counting their bruises, bumps and scratches as they went.

“You’re the one who’s crackers,” Borka replied somewhat belatedly, creeping out of the bushes. “You have a try. If you’re not scared.”

Giggle Guts maintained an impressive silence. Borka walked round the Moshkins' barrel lying near the edge.

"Here goes," he said and climbed in. "Give us a push."

"But you've never done it before," Giggle Guts tried to dissuade him.

"Neither had they," Borka retorted. "Today was the first time for them too."

"But they do something crazy every day," Giggle Guts said. "They're used to it."

"Give me a push, I said!" Borka barked. Giggle Guts and Mum Trap took one look at him, shrugged their shoulders and gave the barrel such a push that it practically whistled down the gully.

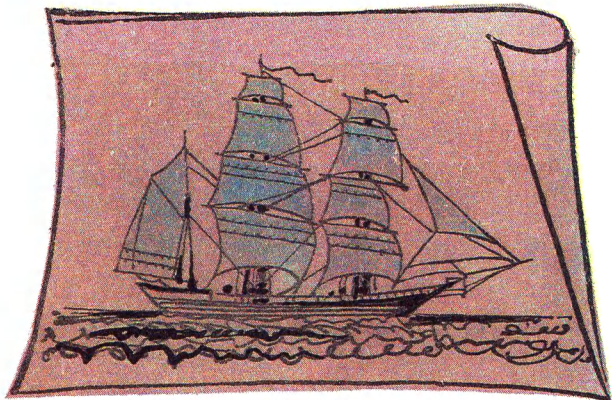
To their surprise the inexperienced Borka not only stayed alive, but even emerged in one piece. Climbing out of the barrel unsteadily, like Misha, he shook his head and exclaimed:

"Hey, look, that was really great!"

"Look yourself," muttered Giggle Guts, disappointed that Borka hadn't even broken his little finger. That would have taught him not to copy those idiots. It was very catching. Even he, Giggle Guts, felt the urge to rocket down the slope inside a barrel. And only by a great effort of will was he able to overcome this crazy impulse.

When Borka and his pals left, the watchman appeared on the edge of the gully. Like a boy, he had been watching all the while surreptitiously behind the fence. He climbed down into the gully and, puffing and panting, rolled the biggest barrel up to the top. Then he stood for a while and thought. He climbed inside and sat there for a bit, like the Greek





philosopher Diogenes. Then he got out, grunted, reflected for a moment and kicked the barrel with his foot.

It rolled noisily down the slope.

"They must be sportsmen," he said. As an old man he had got used to thinking aloud. "Probably top class," he added, after a pause. "Future cosmonauts, I dare say."

Help! A Tiger!

The Moshkins were painting the boat, wincing from time to time and looking sadly at each other's plentiful bruises. The bruises were growing more and more colourful all the time, blooming deep blue, red, mauve and purple, like flowers in a flower-bed.

"You look as if you've been bitten by that leopard yesterday," Zhenka said to the twins, although he and Misha didn't look any better.

"Take a look at yourself," the Moshkins advised him.

"Yes, but what will Aunt Klava say!" Zhenka moaned. "I'm going on strike!" He flung his brush onto the ground. "Did you see that film *Strike* on television? They refused to work in inhuman conditions!"

No sooner had he said that, than suddenly...

But that "suddenly" was preceded by some other events of considerable importance.

The failure of their trick with the dyed Fantomas gave Borka no peace.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again," he went on to persuade Mum Trap. "We must have another go."

"That's enough!" Mum Trap wrote on a page in his notebook.

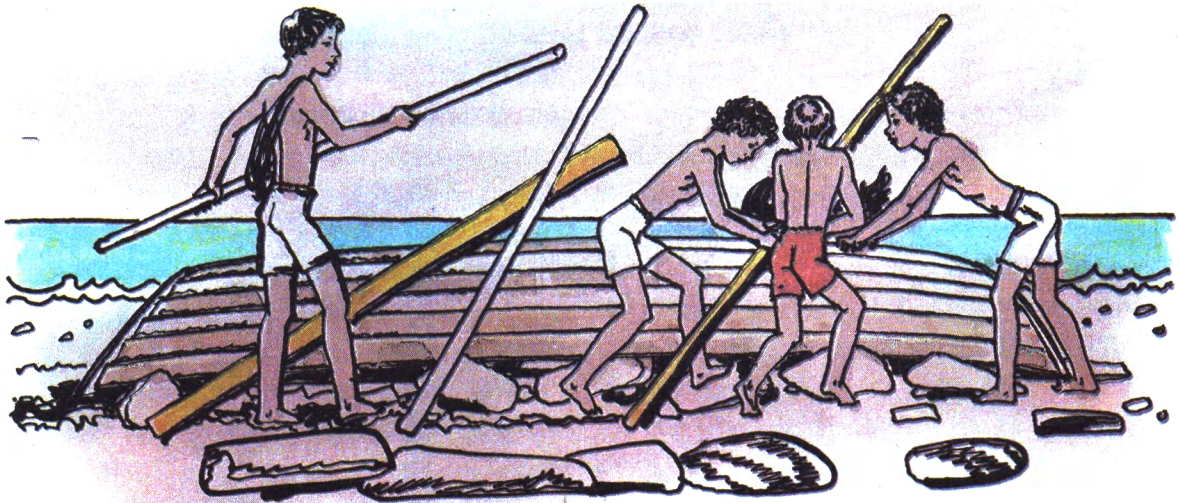
"No, it isn't," Borka went on, stroking his barrel bruises. "We're a bit cleverer now. You'll see."

"You mustn't dye him again!" Mum Trap wrote.

"This'll be the last time, honest!" Borka said. "Tell him, Slavka," he appealed to Giggle Guts.

"Yes, honest," Giggle Guts said flatly, adding anxiously: "You don't think that hound'll chase us up a tree again, do you?"

They were sitting on Mum Trap's verandah. Fantomas was lolling in the corner on an old and very moth-eaten tiger-skin. His head was lying on the tiger's head,



and he was looking sadly with one eye at his master. But when he shifted his gaze to his master's pals, his tail did not give even the faintest of wags.

"I've got it!" Borka shouted suddenly. "Brilliant!"

Fantomas stood up and barked.

"We'll dress him up in this tiger-skin. He's used to it. See?"

Mum Trap reached for his notebook, but Borka restrained him.

"Be quiet! Listen to me first. We won't need to dye the dog. We'll just tie the tiger-skin on him. It's enough to scare the living daylights out of anyone! And we'll put his head inside the tiger's head."

Mum Trap again reached for his notebook, and Borka again stopped him.

"Be quiet! I know, we'll take the tiger's glass eyes out for a bit, and the dog will be able to breathe through the tiger's mouth! It'll have two sets of teeth!" Borka exclaimed delightedly. "And if you like we can make a couple of holes in the tiger's nose for him! Okay?"

After a long pause, Mum Trap gave a reluctant nod. They took the skin and the dog into the hiding-place behind the rocks where they usually watched the others working on the boat.

Borka was right. Fantomas was not very worried by the tiger-skin they put on him. He was used to its appearance and smell, for it had been his bed for many a year. Only at first he wouldn't let them put the tiger's head on him. Then Mum Trap managed to "persuade" him. He also put a muzzle on him, in spite of heated protests from Borka who thought their "monster" would look even more frightening baring two sets of teeth.

They crept up to the rocks from behind and peered out cautiously.

"They're counting their bruises," Slavka giggled.

"Right," Borka began to unwind the long rope he had prudently brought

from home. "It's a good thing we put the muzzle on him. Although even with just his paws he could... Never mind, we'll be holding him," he muttered. "I don't want to do a spell in the detention centre because of them."

"Nobody does," Giggle Guts added. Mum Trap nodded hard.

"How far away are they?" Borka asked impatiently.

"About ten metres," Giggle Guts said.

"And the rope's only eight metres," Borka said reassuringly to the gloomy Mum Trap. "Tie it to his collar and let him go! Don't worry. He won't hurt them. The three of us can hold him back, can't we?"

"We'll hold him back alright," said Giggle Guts.

"Only don't run out to the rescue straightaway," Borka warned them. "Let Fantomas run as far as the rope will let him, to scare them good and proper!"

Mum Trap gave a worried nod.

It was then that Zhenka announced his intention of going on strike like in the film. Suddenly the Moshkin's cat, who came to the "shipyard" to roll in the soft wood shavings, jumped up hissing loudly and arched its back.

The boys looked round. There by the cliffs was a TIGER! A really terrifying one, with a mangy coat and thin legs! Its sunken eyes seemed bottomless, as if they were not there at all! "Grrrr!" it said in a muffled voice.

"Help!" Zhenka's pale lips whispered. Quick as a flash the three of them lifted up the boat and dived under it. The side crashed down on the sand. Then it swung up slightly and they saw the tiger racing with enormous bounds ... after the Moshkins' cat. Behind the tiger trailed a rope. Then the rope went taut and pulled Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts from behind the cliff. It was wound round their hands. They could neither hold back the mysterious tiger, nor get free from it. Tied to it by the rope, they flashed past the boat in a whirl.

The cat dived between two boulders. The tiger rushed after it and got stuck. Struggling free, it jumped out of the tiger-skin and raced on, now easily recognisable as Fantomas the dog pulling the crafty trio along behind him. They disappeared into the horizon in a cloud of sand.

Captivity

"Now I see," Zhenka cried triumphantly. "That leopard yesterday must have been their dog! Only dyed, a different colour!"

Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkins were returning home, chattering gaily and interrupting one another. They had completely forgotten about their bruises and scratches, which passers-by were surveying with astonishment.

"Did you hide the tiger-skin in a good place?" the Moshkins asked Zhenka.

"Yes, they'll never find it. I buried it in the ground! You never know, they might have tried the same trick again!"

Misha laughed and turned off to the shop that sold sports goods.

"Where are you going?" asked the Moshkins. "I'm hungry."

"Maybe they've got some suitable rope now," Misha replied. "I've been going there every day. We need rope for the rigging! What good is a sail without rigging?"

"Have you been in an accident, boys?" the shop woman asked, staring in horror at Misha's bruise-bedecked crew.

"Yes, that's right," Misha nodded.

"A bus accident?" she asked excitedly.

"Tram," the Moshkins replied, supporting Zhenka who suddenly hung like a wounded soldier with an arm round each twin's neck.

"Do you have any nylon rope? We need it for the rigging," Misha asked.

"Not at the moment. We're getting a delivery this afternoon. Was anyone killed?" asked the shop woman, intrigued by the "tram accident".

"No, not a soul," Zhenka called out, suddenly "recovering".

"You'd better come right after the lunch break, or it'll sell out. This is the first delivery we've had this summer. There won't be another one until October. Where did the accident happen?" she asked sympathetically.

"Oh, somewhere over there," said Misha with a vague wave of his hand. "We'll get here in good time. Thanks a lot."

"You're welcome." The shop woman shook her head. "Well, I never. You're lucky to still be in one piece."

As soon as she clapped eyes on Misha and Zhenka, Aunt Klava grabbed them by the arm and marched them up to the attic without a word. She then proceeded to rub eau de cologne on their bruises and scratches (Zhenka only gave a few squeals), and covered them with plasters from head to foot, all in total silence.

Then she went out, locked the door and only then said:

"My patience is exhausted. You can stay there until you're better."

"But Aunty! Dear Aunty!" they exclaimed.

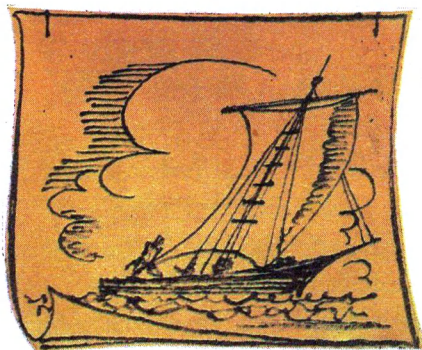
The key rasped again in the lock. Aunt Klava had prudently turned it a second time.

"We can't stay here." Misha paced the room nervily. "Time doesn't stand still, and there's so little left."

"What do you mean?" asked Zhenka.

"Time only goes forward," Misha explained. "To the future. And in the future there won't be any rope. It will get sold out today, and that'll be that."

"I see," said Zhenka sadly. "We've had it."



Part IV

“I HASTEN TO YOUR CALL”

“Catch that cat!”

“**W**hat can we do?” Zhenka said. “Just wait?”

“For the cows to come home?” Misha snapped. He paced up and down the room for a bit, then looked out of the window. A thick cable from the TV aerial ran down from the roof and disappeared into a small window on the ground floor.

“Is it strong enough?” Misha asked.

“I think so,” Zhenka replied uncertainly.

Misha pulled the cable over to the window, tugged at it once, then again harder. The cable did not snap.

“It is strong enough,” said Misha and began climbing down it.

“Misha!” came Aunt Klava’s voice. “Mi-sha!”

Misha froze, his hands clutching the cable. Aunt Klava was standing in the doorway of the summer kitchen, holding a large and probably very heavy ladle.

“What do you think you’re doing! Back you go at once!”

Misha climbed hurriedly up again.

“The antenna, the antenna!” Aunt Klava cried in the yard.

“If you’ve bent the antenna, you’ll have to mend it,” said Zhenka, his proprietorial instincts suddenly aroused. “How will I be able to watch television?”

“Stop that,” Misha muttered. “It’s bad enough without you... We won’t be able to buy the rope now... And what use is a sail without rigging! How can we control the sail?”

“But we haven’t got a sail!”

“Of course we haven’t. How can we get anything, if we’re stuck in here all the



time!" Misha tiptoed to the door, put his ear to it and waved to Zhenka. "Give me a newspaper."

Zhenka watched mystified as Misha pushed the newspaper under the door.

"This is a very reliable trick," Misha whispered. "I got it from a book about Major Pronin, the master counterspy."

Misha pulled a nail out of the wall, pushed it into the lock, and the key dropped out onto the newspaper outside.

"Here we are." Misha pulled the newspaper back with the key.

"Hey, that was clever!" Zhenka exclaimed in a whisper.

Misha pulled the curtains, then quickly rolled up two blankets and covered them with sheets so Aunt Klava would think that he and Zhenka were sleeping peacefully, when she came in.

"Follow me!" Misha opened the door.

They began to creep carefully downstairs and suddenly stopped short. Aunt Klava was coming up towards them carrying two plates of soup, which she dropped as soon as she saw them. The boys rushed upstairs with Aunt Klava pounding along behind them.

She gazed at the door in amazement. The key was in the lock. Then she pulled the door towards her, and it opened.

"We thought you'd forgiven us," Zhenka started gabbling. "We tried the door and it was open."

"Surely I didn't forget to lock it?" Aunt Klava muttered to herself, looking at the key. Going out, she locked the door carefully, turning the key twice again.

"You can go without your dinner!" she called and started to go downstairs. Then she came back, took another look at the key, and tried the door to make sure it was locked. After that she paused for a moment, slipped the key into her pocket and went downstairs, glancing back uncertainly.

"We've really had it now," Zhenka panicked.

"What about the Moshkins!" Pulling the curtains, Misha took his telescope and trained it on the Moshkins' house which stood on a slight rise behind the neighbouring yard. The twins were sitting by an open window, hands clasped primly on their laps, while their mother bathed their numerous bruises.

"They're in for it too," said Misha. The Moshkins' mother said something to them angrily and went away.

"Give me a mirror," Misha ordered. Zhenka hurriedly thrust a small one into his hand. Misha caught a sunbeam on it and sent the reflection dancing over the grass past Aunt Klava, who was watering the pear trees, through a crack in the neighbouring fence, across the yard, up the wall, over into the Moshkin's yard (where a big fluffy cat began chasing it, but could not catch it) and straight into the twins' eyes. They waved their arms, as if chasing away a swarm of bees, and leaned out of the window.

Misha leant over the window-sill and shouted:

"Mo-o-sh-kins!.."

"Be quiet up there!" cried Aunt Klava, whose patience really was exhausted. "The holidaymakers are trying to have an after-lunch nap, and he goes shouting the place down. If you're not careful I'll nail up the window and you can sit in a stuffy room."

"Can I talk silently?" Misha asked.

"Yes, you can," she replied, mystified.

He took out his code flags and signalled a desperate SOS to the twins.

Borka and his pals, who were hiding on the roof of a nearby barn and had been watching Misha's strange antics for some time, craned their necks.

"Let's go," said Giggie Guts impatiently. "Watching them like this all the time only lands us in a load of trouble. You with your 'give them a scare, then rescue them!' And what happened! We lost the tiger skin. Mum Trap's dad'll skin him alive if he finds out it's gone, you'll see!"

Mum Trap nodded and wrote in his notebook:

"He already knows."

"Did it hurt?" Boris asked sympathetically.

Mum Trap nodded.

"But you didn't tell him?"

Mum Trap shook his head.

"Good lad," Borka said. "He didn't spill the beans. We must keep an eye on them. Misha never does anything without a reason. They're up to something

again." And once more he glued his eye to the half binocular.

"Even I can't understand a thing," said Giggle Guts, as he watched the flags flashing in the window.

Mum Trap nodded.

"I can't make that out, can you?" the Moshkins asked each other in unison.

"They won't understand," Zhenka said to Misha. "They don't know it."

"I can see that." Misha was disappointed. "I just thought they might. After all, you do live by the sea, yet you don't know the shortest and most important signal of all—SOS! That brings all sailors to the rescue at once!"

But the Moshkins were quick on the uptake. They hadn't understood the signal, but they realised that Misha needed them. So, knowing that he had a telescope, they wrote in big letters on some pages from an exercise book, which they then held up at the window:

"I'M LOCKED IN"

"So they can't get out either," said Misha.

Some new letters appeared: "I'LL COME IF THEY LET ME OUT."

"They'll come." Misha banged one fist against the other. "They'll come down when the sun goes down!"

"But they may come earlier," said Zhenka. "They may come before the sports shop closes."

"Well, they're the only hope we've got." Misha sat down miserably on the bed.

"What can we do?" asked Zhenka as usual.

"What we need is a fire," Misha murmured thoughtfully. "Lots of smoke coming out of the window, but no flames. A fire! That's it! They'll let us out straightaway. And before they find out what was happening, we'll buy the rope."

"We'll be in trouble then," Zhenka hesitated.

"We're in trouble now. It can't be any worse," Misha replied firmly. "We'll get locked in again. But we're locked in now, only now we haven't got the rope. But then we will have it!"

"Yes, I see," Zhenka nodded. "What shall we burn? Paper?"

"No, paper catches fire. It would burn the house down." Misha hurriedly pulled his suitcase from under the bed, rummaged about in it and eventually gave up. "Oh, dear! I forgot to bring my camera!"

"What do you need it for?" Zhenka asked in surprise.

"The film! It smokes like a chimney, but doesn't catch fire! The film they make these days is not combustible."

"Would a film strip be any good?" Zhenka asked.

"Of course it would."

Zhenka hurriedly opened the wardrobe. Inside was a projector and a box of film strips.

"Here we are!" he said proudly, picking up one of them and unrolling it. "Chapayev," he announced and sighed sadly. "I don't want to burn that one..."

One after the other he examined and put aside the film strips, not knowing which one to choose:

"Red Riding Hood ... Pinocchio ... Peter and the Wolf ... Tom Thumb..." Zhenka was so upset at the idea of burning his beloved film strips, that he almost started crying.

"Oh, we won't then," Misha took pity on him.

"Yes, we must," Zhenka said wildly. He turned round, took a film strip without looking at it and quickly wrapped it in paper.

"There!" he announced happily. "I don't know which one it is."

Meanwhile Aunt Klava was busy making jam in a large pan.

Misha and Zhenka stuck their heads out of the attic window.

"Fire! Fire!" they yelled loudly.

Aunt Klava stood stock-still with the ladle in her hand. Smoke was billowing out of the window.

"Rescue the children!" cried an old man in a pince-nez, the head of the family of holidaymakers to whom Aunt Klava had let the verandah and summer kitchen.

Misha and Zhenka slid down the cable of the television aerial. The garden gate was jammed with tenants trying to get into the street with their suitcases! Misha and Zhenka could not push their way through.

They rushed up to the fence, but Aunt Klava grabbed them by the arm.

"You just stay right by me!" she ordered, not letting go of them.

There was a lot of noise and shouting. Neighbours and passers-by ran up to see what the commotion was about.

"I've called the Fire Brigade!" someone cried. "They're on their way."

"We won't do it again!" said Zhenka in a scared voice.

"Won't do what?" Aunt Klava asked suspiciously.

"Burn ... film," and Zhenka burst out crying.

Misha and Zhenka sat mournfully by the window, picking at some fried fish with a fork. The room was quite empty! No clothes, blankets, sheets or even mattresses. Only the bedsteads. Which are not inflammable, of course.

The old gentleman ventured cautiously into the yard.

"Excuse me," he said to Aunt Klava. "I've lost my pince-nez here..." He rummaged around for a bit on the ground, found the pince-nez and hurried off again.

"Where are you going?" Aunt Klava asked him sadly. There was a nervous tic in his cheek. He gave a forced smile and disappeared into one of the neighbouring houses. The family of holidaymakers had obviously found somewhere else to stay.

Misha and Zhenka ate their fish without taking their eyes off the Moshkins' house.



“Look at it!” Zhenka suddenly laughed. The playful cat in the Moshkins’ yard was chasing feathers and bits of paper.

“Who?”

“Barsik, the Moshkins’ cat,” Zhenka replied. “It lives in their room under the sofa. It’s as stupid as can be. Remember how it chased the reflection from your mirror? It’s even more stupid than Slavka Giggle Guts.”

“What’s the cat got to do with it?” Misha said despondently. “I’m thinking about something else. Suppose they do let the twins out... By the time they get over here, it’ll be too late. There won’t be any rope left. The last few metres will be sold and that’ll be the end of it. The shop’s close to their house. If only they could go and buy some straightaway!”

“Yes, it’s right next door to them,” Zhenka agreed. Then he burst out laughing again. “Just look at that cat, it’s so funny!”

“What’s the cat got to do with it!” Misha exclaimed again angrily, then suddenly stopped short.

“Nothing at all,” Zhenka replied, looking surprised. “What’s up with you?”

“No, the cat does have something to do with it,” Misha announced seriously. “Where’s the mirror? Quick!”

As Misha had hoped, the teasing reflection of the sun, bright and playful, slipping slowly out of Barsik’s fluffy paws, brought the cat straight to their house.

The ever-watchful Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts, who had bored to tears, fixed their eyes on the cat.

“They’re up to something,” Borka said again. “Their brainboxes are bubbling with ideas. Not like yours.” He tapped Slavka Giggle Guts on the top of the head.

“Mine might be bubbling even more,” said Giggle Guts in an injured voice. “Only you can’t see it.”

“That’s true. It’s not made of glass,” Borka grinned. “So get out of the way. You’re blocking the view.” And he glued one eye to the binocular again.

Misha threw down a fish head. The cat immediately gobbled it up and stretched back its head.

"Why do you need it?" Zhenka asked. "Are you bored?"

"It can help. Got any thread?"

"Yes..."

"Then give me some quickly!"

Misha tied a piece of fish to the thread and threw it down to the lowest rung on the outside staircase.

The cat went over to it at once. Misha pulled the thread, and Barsik obediently pranced along behind the fish.

"Puss, puss, puss." Misha pulled up the fish onto the window-sill. The cat jumped up onto the balcony rail, then in through the window. Misha seized it by the scruff of the neck, put it on the floor and shut the window.

"You're going to be our messenger." He scribbled a message quickly and put his precious ten-rouble note inside it. "Now, according to the theory of probability, the cat will run off home. Where else could it go?"

"Fantastic!" was all that Zhenka could say.

"Only don't give it any more to eat. Or it won't go back to the Moshkins for a long time." Misha took off one of his socks and pushed the message and the money into it. "They'll notice at once that there's something hanging round its neck. They'll read the message and everything will be okay." So saying he tied the precious sock round the cat's neck. "Open the window."

Finding itself on the balcony, the cat did not want to go away. It walked up and down the rail, looking at them beseechingly.

"Bow-wow!" Zhenka barked at it. And Barsik fled for dear life.

"It'll prowls around for half an hour, then go home," Zhenka announced. "We've whetted its appetite."

"Let's hope it doesn't lose the money," said Misha anxiously. "It's all we've got."

Barsik walked a little way from the house and lay down.

"It's lying down," Misha exclaimed in horror.

"Home, Barsik, home!" they hissed down at it.

The cat got up reluctantly and went off—not home but out into the street.

"Don't worry," Zhenka tried to comfort Misha. "It knows the way home alright."

"But does it go home every day?" Misha asked, afraid he might never set eyes not only on the rope but also on his ten roubles.

"What a fool I am!" he cursed himself silently. "Fancy giving money to a cat!" But Zhenka chattered on happily:

"It won't get lost. They've had it for four months now, and it's never disappeared."

"I told the Moshkins in the message that if they didn't get the rope we wouldn't be

able to sail round the world," Misha said briskly to Zhenka.

"Why round the world?" Zhenka asked in surprise. "That's for much later! We want to sail to Tallinn first."

"Yes, to Tallinn," Misha replied. "But say the message falls into someone else's hands. They'd believe it about Tallinn, but not about round the world."

"Will the Moshkins catch on?" Zhenka scratched the back of his head.

"Of course, they will. Remember I told them we might go round the world after Tallinn? And they said that to Tallinn and back was almost round the world. But that's not the main thing. They must realise how important it is to get the rope."

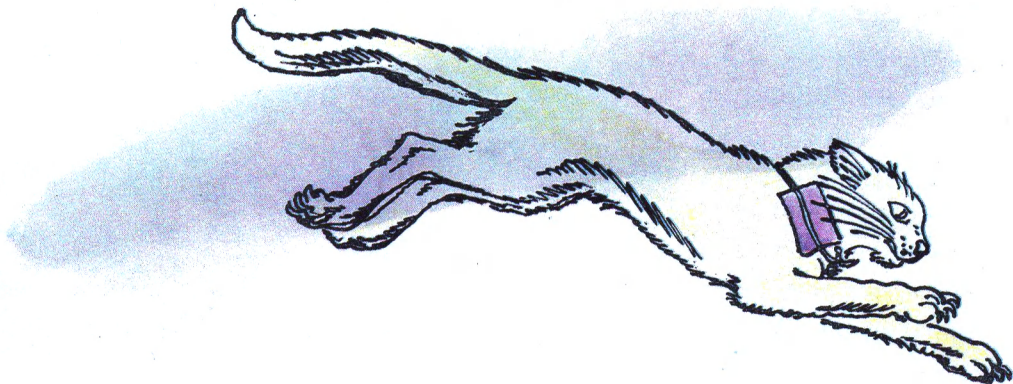
Automatically training his binocular on the cat, Borka suddenly noticed the strange striped packet round his neck.

"Catch that cat!" he ordered Mum Trap and Giggle Guts in a terrible voice.

More of Borka's unsporting dreams

It was a long business catching the cat. It took them about an hour and a half. Barsik hid behind beams and under porches, climbing up trees and even telegraph poles. It probably didn't like being pursued by three boys of villainous appearance with outstretched hands like scarecrows', who bore down from all sides, winking, hissing "shush" loudly to one another and "puss, puss!" to it, and calling "Come here, Ginger!" Or perhaps it thought they were playing and decided to join in too? Barsik alone knows the answer to that.

When they eventually caught the cat and removed the uncomfortable thing from its neck, it did not want to go away and kept rubbing itself against Borka's leg, while Borka undid the sock. Barsik obviously could not understand why they had



been trying to catch it for so long and were now driving it away.

"Shoo, shoo, Ginger!"

When Borka removed the message from the sock, the money fell out of it.

"A ten-rouble note!" Giggle Guts exclaimed, bending over it. Borka pushed him out of the way and put the money in his pocket.

"We're locked in too," he read. "If you get out, buy the rope at once, 50 metres. Or it will get sold out, and there won't be any Round the World. Misha Yenokhin."

"Hear that?" Borka looked up. "They're planning to go round the world!"

"Silly idiots!" scoffed Giggle Guts. "*Round the World* magazine is as far as they'd get!"

Mum Trap was about to nod, but shot a prudent glance at Borka.

"Round the world!" Borka exclaimed enviously. "The whole country would hear about that!"

"Not only the whole country," Giggle Guts changed his tune quickly. "The whole world!"

"We won't sail round the world, of course," Borka said dreamily. "Who wants to do that?"

"We'd drown," Giggle Guts agreed.

"We'll take the boat," Borka continued, "and hide away somewhere in a secret cove. For five or six months..."

"That means we'll miss school!" Giggle Guts said with a broad grin.

"And send letters home with stamps from Australia, Czechoslovakia and the Mongolian People's Republic..." Borka mused happily.

"Wait a minute," Giggle Guts, another ignoramus, interrupted him. "Australia and Czechoslovakia might have seas or oceans, but I don't think Mongolia has. I saw it on a map the other day."

"That doesn't matter. Nobody in my family could care less about that. As long as the stamps are foreign," Borka said, then repeated: "We'll send letters ... as if we were at sea." He gazed dreamily at the blue sky. "We'll sail away from the quay in one direction and reappear six months later from the opposite one. And everyone will think we've been round the world! Listen! Just imagine what sort of reception we'll get!"

And they listened and imagined what it would be like.

The boat with its tall sail rent with holes sails proudly up to the quayside accompanied by battleships, motor ships and a vast number of yachts, launches and motor-boats.

The whole town, young and old alike, is on the quay! Even babies in prams and old men in wheel-chairs!

"And holidaymakers in straw hats," Borka added.

There are foreigners covered with souvenir badges holding a Russian *matryoshka* doll in one hand and a camera in the other! Under the notice "Relatives and Next-of-

kin" stand the parents of Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts and all their relatives, close and distant! The ranks of the relatives and next-of-kin are brought up by Fantomas the dog, wearing a laurel wreath in Mum Trap's honour.

Standing proudly by another notice which says "Comrades and Friends" are all the boys and girls Borka and his pals have tormented!

The third notice says "Helpers"! It is being lifted up joyfully on a pole by Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkin twins.

There are correspondents, newsmen, radio and television!

A combined Pioneer brass band (from all the towns in the Soviet Union) and the Bolshoi Theatre children's choir (which had been on the radio recently!) are performing the song "Captain Brave, Captain Brave, give smile, sir!" (in various foreign languages so that everyone could understand!).

Borka smiles behind his moustache. His moustache suddenly slips sideways, but he deftly and unobtrusively puts it in place. The other "round-the-worlders" are also hardly recognisable! Mum Trap and Giggle Guts are sporting luxuriant side-whiskers, which they grew during their long voyage!

Their boat moors at the quayside. It is immediately picked up by admirers together with the three heroes and carried to a granite pedestal erected in honour of their remarkable voyage! The pedestal is surrounded by anchors and chains. On the way Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts are showered with flowers, real and artificial. Someone (carried away with delight) throws them his season's ticket for the world ice-hockey championship!

"Don't fight over it," Borka tells his pals. "We'll get one each. From the national ice-hockey team! This is just a spare."

The boat is hoisted onto its stone bed. The interviews, filming, photographing and embraces from relatives, friends, comrades and helpers at last come to an end.

Then the most interesting part begins! Thousands of boys and girls queue up for souvenirs. The queue is very long and very well organised (protected by the mounted police). It winds round all the squares, highways, streets and alleys in the town without crossing. Each boy and girl has brought some treasured possession: an air-gun, a pen-knife, a glider, a football, pigeons or a puppy with a pedigree ... all sorts of things!

After condescendingly examining each offering, Borka puts it in the pile and breaks a splinter off the side of the boat or cuts a piece off the sail as a souvenir.

In return for an air-gun that "generous idiot" Giggle Guts hands the ship's wheel to a boy, who kisses it reverently! But clever, stingy Mum Trap shouts, "Give it back!" (his voice has returned), grabs the wheel and breaks one small splinter off it. Hugging the precious splinter, the boy walks off alongside the queue, accompanied by envious glances.

At the sight of the mountain of fine presents the gang's eyes shine with delight.

"Fantastic!" said Giggle Guts slowly, when Borka had finished his enthralling

tale. Mum Trap nodded once, twice, then went on nodding hard.

"We'll just have to get in with them! Like we wanted to before! Only how? How?" exclaimed Giggle Guts.

"See this?" Borka shoved Misha's message and money under his nose. "I said we had to keep our eyes on them! We'll scratch their backs, then they'll scratch ours! Get it?"

"Got it," Giggle Guts cried.

"Now or never!" Borka exclaimed.

"Now!" Giggle Guts shouted.

"Now!" Mum Trap scribbled quickly in his notebook.

"Off to the sports shop then," Borka ordered.

"Bought with the cat's money"

In vain did Misha and Zhenka wait for the Moshkins to appear under the window with a coil of rope in their hands. And in vain did they wait for Barsik the cat to appear at the Moshkins. And, of course, their hopes that Aunt Klava, who was pottering about in the yard all the time, would relent and free them from their "prison", that her steps would suddenly sound on the stairs like a festive tattoo, the lock click happily, the door creak joyfully open, and Auntie would exclaim in her resounding baritone, "The prisons are opened, and freedom awaits you!"—they were also in vain. Aunt Klava had found herself all sorts of things to do in the yard: repairing the fence, pruning the laurel bushes and beating the carpet. She had obviously thought up these jobs so as not to be bored at her post of sentry.

When darkness forced her to leave the yard, however, Misha repeated his risky climb down the television cable. This time he managed to reach the ground. Zhenka watched him anxiously through the window. They had wisely turned out the light in the attic. Misha hurried to the gate, but tripped on something. There was a terrible clattering and clanging, and Aunt Klava's window shot open.

"In you go, Misha!" she called in the darkness. "Unless you want me to send you back to Moscow!"

How had she guessed that it was Misha in the yard? The clattering and clanging by the gate continued.

"Misha!" Aunt Klava raised her voice.

"I can't get untangled..." the invisible Misha replied miserably.

"You got tangled up, so you can get untangled too," Aunt Klava commented.

When Misha eventually came back into the room (Aunt Klava helped him and marched him up to the attic herself), he asked gloomily:

"Tin cans, was it?"

"That's right," Aunt Klava smiled, then went out, forgetting to wish her nephews good night, but not forgetting to lock the door after her.

"What tin cans?" Zhenka asked, puzzled.

"The sort that have corned beef in them," Misha pouted. "She strung them up on some fishing gut all over the place, so you couldn't take a step without tripping on them and sounding the alarm. When did she manage to do that?"

"But how did she recognise you in the dark?" asked Zhenka.

"Use your loaf," said Misha sarcastically. "Who else could it have been, except me. Not you."

Misha did not try to escape anymore, because his aunt's threat to send him back to Moscow had given him food for thought.

Next morning when Aunt Klava brought the "prisoners" their breakfast, Misha said firmly:

"We don't want any breakfast. We're on hunger strike."

"Oh, you are, are you," she replied. "Then you can go without your dinner too."

Zhenka shot a worried glance at Misha.

"We don't want any supper either," Misha announced.

"That's right," Zhenka nodded. "We won't eat anything... Except for the compote. Eh, Misha? So bring us a nice big portion, Aunty."

That must have decided it. Aunt Klava burst out laughing and left the room, for some reason forgetting to lock the "convicts" in.

"Hey, you up there!" she cried from the front garden. "Sick of sitting at home, are you? That'll teach you! You can come out now!"

Misha and Zhenka rushed to the door.

They sped round to the Moshkins' gate. The twins' mother appeared behind the fence and said sternly:

"They're not at home."

"But I just saw them at the window," Zhenka fibbed.

"I told you, they're not in," their mother snapped. "They're being punished. I see you're covered with bruises, too, like giraffes."

"Guraffes have dark yellow spots," Misha said.

"So have you. They must be getting better, thank goodness." The twins' mother walked away towards the house.

"Excuse me," Zhenka called after her, "but did your cat come home yesterday? And if so, at what time?"

The twins' mother spun round angrily.

They decided to make themselves scarce.

"What do you think? Did they buy it?" Zhenka asked Misha miserably.

"Doesn't look like it. I only hope the cat hasn't lost the money."

They decided to see how the boat was getting on first, then go back and see how the

Moshkins were getting on. If the cat had come back late, the Moshkins would only just have found the money.

Misha didn't bother to go to the sports shop, it would only have upset him. He had no money now, and the rope was probably sold out anyway. It was better to live in painful hopes, than hopeless pain.

When they walked round the old quay onto the deserted beach, they heard some vigorous hammering.

"That's by the boat!" Misha said worriedly.

They ran round some rocks and stopped in amazement.

There on the beach Mum Trap and Giggle Guts were hammering away like mad, removing the rust from the anchor chain. Next to them sat Borka with a file, polishing the teeth of a small anchor, just what Misha had been dreaming of.

They stopped work at once.

"Go away!" Zhenka shouted loudly.

"Hi there," Borka greeted them casually.

"Hi," said Giggle Guts gaily. Mum Trap nodded to them courteously.

"Go away! Go away!" Zhenka squealed.

Misha stood there, swaying slightly, as if he were about to collapse at any minute.

"Don't shout," Borka said to Zhenka.

"No need to shout like that," Giggle Guts said mildly. And Mum Trap gave Zhenka a reproving look as if to say, "What on earth do you think you're doing?"

"We're joining your crew," Borka announced glibly. With a flourish he took a fat package out of the boat and threw it down at Misha's feet. The package fell open—inside was a coil of nylon rope.

"Bought with the cat's money," said Borka.

"We caught the cat," Giggle Guts chortled and stopped short.

Misha stared at the precious package by his feet, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"Misha," Giggle Guts began, imploringly. "Let us join... What's the matter?"

Mum Trap pulled a long face and began rubbing his eyes with his fists, as if he were crying.

"It was the last bit they had. We were lucky to get it," Borka announced.

Misha said nothing.

"So you don't want to share anything, eh?" Borka snapped.

"Greedy guts," said Giggle Guts, and Mum Trap nodded.

"We're not greedy," Zhenka objected.

"And Young Pioneers too," Borka drawled. "Real Young Pioneers don't behave like that."

Misha continued to look down. Not at the rope any more, but at Borka's shoe with its untied shoelace. Intercepting his glance, Borka winked knowingly, bent down and did up his shoelace.

"Hey, they've let me out!" they heard. And up ran the Moshkin twins, hopping about gaily.

"Very well," Misha agreed, giving Borka and his pals a stern look. "Only if you don't pass our new sports test, we won't take you on."

"Give us a test if you like," said Borka eagerly. "We'll pass it alright."

"Tell us what to do," Giggle Guts demanded. Mum Trap nodded.

"I haven't decided yet," Misha confessed. "It must be a very hard test."

The new "sports" test

Next day they all gathered by the boat. Each of them had to suggest a very hard test.

"Watering the garden," said the Moshkins miserably.

"Digging the garden," Giggle Guts sighed heavily.

"Selling apples," said Borka gloomily.

"Doing the washing," Mum Trap wrote on a page in his notebook.

"Yes," Misha agreed. "That's a good idea. Why don't we find a nursery school and do all their washing for them, down to the last nappy. Then we'd see who can really work hard."

"Don't like the sound of that," Borka hissed, digging Giggle Guts with his elbow.

"But they wouldn't trust us," Misha continued. Everyone brightened up. "What a pity, that's a really hard job..."

"Scrubbing floors is just as hard," said Zhenka, who had not suggested anything yet. "They make the duty prefects scrub the floors in our school. Only in their own classroom, though, not the whole school, thank goodness. That would really wear you out."

Misha stood up.

"That's it. Which school do you go to?"

"Number five, Primorskaya," Borka answered reluctantly.

Zhenka frowned, sensing that he shouldn't have said that.

"How many floors has it got?" Misha asked.

"Five," Giggle Guts growled. "Perhaps we could choose a smaller one, eh?" He had guessed straightaway.

"There are seven of us," Misha said. "Only five floors?"

"Plus two staircases!" Borka snapped angrily. "That's no joke! They've each got a hundred and ten steps!"

"That's fine! I'd forgotten about the staircases!" Misha exclaimed happily. "There are seven of us. Five floors and two staircases—that's just what we want."

"Who wants it?" Zhenka whined. "Why should me and the Moshkins do the test

too? We're already crew members. The test is for them! They scrub the floors, then we let them into the crew!"

"That's not fair!" said Misha. "How can we give other people a test, when we don't know if we could do it ourselves."

"Right!" Borka and Giggle Guts agreed fervently. Mum Trap nodded. They obviously did not want to scrub the floors on their own.

"Do we have to do the classrooms or just the corridors?" Giggle Guts put up his hand, and immediately got a clip round the ear from Borka.

"The classrooms as well, of course," Misha replied artlessly.

"Let's go and ask permission," the Moshkins said in unison.

"No, we won't ask. That's no fun," Misha replied. "We'll keep it a secret, do it at night."

"By moonlight?" Borka asked, thinking that would be better, because you couldn't tell whether a floor had been scrubbed properly or not.

"I'll check them afterwards with a torch," said Misha, guessing what he had in mind.

This time neither Misha and Zhenka nor the Moshkin twins were kept at home. They were able to slip out late in the evening, although they were afraid their absence would suddenly be discovered. But who would have suspected that they would go out so late if no one had told them not to or locked them in?

Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts had no trouble at all getting out as usual. Firstly, they all slept in the garden anyway. Secondly, it would never have occurred to them that children should be asleep at night. And thirdly, they could always say (Mum Trap in writing) that they had agreed to do some night fishing. In short, it was no problem for them. They did just as they liked all summer, coming home only to eat and sleep whenever they felt like it. Their parents had given up trying to reason with them a long time ago. If they did shout at them from time to time, it was only for appearances' sake. Borka's father, for example, was proud that his son was so independent. "He's no cissy. He can stand up for himself," he used to say to his neighbours at the next stall in the market. When the school complained about Borka's bad behaviour and equally bad marks, his father would reply: "What about the famous pilot, Valery Chkalov. He wasn't a little Lord Fauntleroy either. He was quite a lad at school and in later life too. Did you see that film? Yet he became famous all over the world!" "What do you mean—Chkalov was quite a lad?" they objected. "He took risks and was very reckless, that's true. But later on..." "And my lad will have a later on too, don't you know? Just because he's a bit wild now—that needs some risk-taking and recklessness too! And he won't be at home much longer. I'll send him to naval school to learn to be a senior mechanic! They earn a packet!"

They met up at the school at eleven p.m. They had all brought cloths and buckets, and Giggle Guts had a kettle.

"What's that for?" asked Misha. "To make tea?"

"No, to pour water," Giggle Guts replied calmly. "You sprinkle water over the floors, then rub them with a cloth."

"Wash them, not rub them," Misha corrected him sternly. "Only a kettle's not very good for that. And have you thought where you're going to wring out the cloth?"

"But it's a nice big kettle," Giggle Guts demurred, hesitantly. "Just right for the job."

The school had obviously been repaired and decorated recently. In the yard there were long benches, some covered with lime.

"It's probably clean inside after the decorating," Giggle Guts said happily, thinking they wouldn't have to work so hard.

Misha tried the door. It was locked.

"Won't be a minute." He set off round the school, looking at the windows.

"Did you ever see a place clean after the decorators had been in?" Zhenka said cuttingly to Giggle Guts.

"It'll be twice as hard," Borka sighed.

"Three times," Giggle Guts remarked vengefully.

"It's all your fault," Borka whispered threateningly in Zhenka's ear. "Couldn't you have thought of something easier?"

"It just slipped out," Zhenka said guiltily.

"Pity your tongue didn't slip out too," Borka hissed.

"Stop rowing, you lot. Let's get on with it. I'm sleepy," whined the Moshkin twins.

Having walked round the school, Misha reappeared by the "cleaning squad."

"There's a small window open at the back."

Giggle Guts was right. It was clean in the school. Even by the light of Misha's torch, to say nothing of the moonlight shining in through the big windows, they could see that the floors were shining! But Misha said:

"Nothing is ever absolutely clean. Even outer space is full of cosmic dust. Look!" He rubbed his clean handkerchief over the ceramic tiles in the corridor. The handkerchief turned grey at once.

"Ready, steady, go!" Misha cried.

The boys filled the buckets and kettle with water from the washbasins and set off to their respective floors. Misha had the fourth, Zhenka the third, the Moshkins the second and first, Mum Trap the ground floor, and Borka and Giggle Guts the two staircases.

It was good that the staff room, the library, the hall, the gym, the chemistry, biology and physics rooms and the language laboratory were locked. Otherwise as Borka said later: "We would each have taken home a skeleton." "How could we have?" Giggle Guts asked, puzzled. "There's only one skeleton in the school, and the biology room is locked!" "Our own skeleton, stupid!" Borka told him.

Yes, Misha found out that floor washing is not a bed of roses. The floor seemed to be endless, although there were only four classrooms and the corridor. Fortunately there were no desks in the classrooms. Just imagine having to move them to do the cleaning and then put them back afterwards! Probably the old desks had been taken away to be replaced by new, modern ones.

It took Misha two-and-a-half hours to do his floor. He kept looking at the fluorescent clock in the street.

When he had finished, Misha threw the cloth into the empty bucket and, groaning with exhaustion, did a few exercises, until his back loosened up again.

Then he switched on his torch and went to see how the others were getting on. The staircase he went down was sparkling clean.

"Well done, Borka," Misha said to himself.

But the staircase was only clean up to the third floor. He could not hear the clanging of a bucket or any other sound for that matter.

He discovered Borka in one of the classrooms, fast asleep in a corner with his arm under his head.

Misha woke him up, shaking him hard by the shoulder. At first Borka just blinked and stared vacantly at him. But then he came too, grabbed the bucket and cloth and rushed to his staircase without a word.

Zhenka was asleep in another classroom on the same floor, the Moshkins on the second floor, Mum Trap on the ground floor, and Giggle Guts on the top landing of the second staircase. They all had to be shaken awake and, afraid that the "captain" would be angry all of them, except Zhenka, quickly resumed what they had been doing. Only Zhenka began whining as usual:

"I'm tired. I haven't had a proper night's sleep for ages, because you snore. Ask Aunt Klava, she'll tell you!"

But Misha wasn't stupid enough to go and ask Aunt Klava whether he snored at night. Without a word he took Zhenka's cloth and began to wash the floor himself.

"Can't take a joke!" Zhenka, spurred to action, grabbed the cloth back from him. "You've got one of your own."

For about another hour Misha walked up and down the stairs and corridors like a patrol scout. He tried to help, but they all told him to go away, afraid it might be a trick and he would say afterwards that they hadn't passed the test because someone had helped them.

The inseparable Moshkin twins scrubbed their two floors together.

"Three's a crowd," they said to Misha when he tried to help them.

Misha assessed the floor-scrubbing as a whole at B-plus. He gave Zhenka, the least diligent worker, a C. In the end Misha had to help him, or he wouldn't even have finished by morning.

When they climbed out into the yard just before daybreak and closed the window behind them, Borka suddenly put his arm round Zhenka's shoulder.

"I'm as tired as you are," he complained.

"It'll be harder at sea," Misha said calmly.

"No, it won't" Borka replied confidently.

They dragged themselves to the crossroads, wearily shook one another by the hand and went their several ways.

The Moshkins walked off, supporting each other in brotherly fashion. Misha solicitously helped Zhenka along. And Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts hobbled along, leaning on one another, worn out.

A sailing lesson: "Wind direction"

"Let's repeat it. What does the term 'tack' mean?" Misha said, walking up and down in front of his crew, who were sitting by the boat. "Borka!"

Borka jumped up and rapped out smartly:

"The nautical term 'tack' is used to define the position of a boat in relation to the wind. If there is a starboard wind, the sail is on the port side and the boat is on the starboard tack."

"Correct," said Misha approvingly. "Slavka!"

Giggle Guts got up.

"What is a starboard tack?"

"Starboard..." Giggle Guts mumbled. "Well, er, there's port tack ... and there's starboard tack."

"Sit down," Misha said angrily. "Zhenka!"

Zhenka jumped up.

"If there is a port wind, the sail is on the starboard side and the boat is on the port tack."

"Correct," Misha nodded.

Giggle Guts said to Mum Trap in an envious whisper:

"It's alright for Zhenka. His dad's a captain. Zhenka's known it all since the cradle."

"What is a contrary wind?" Misha asked. "Slavka!"

"Me again!" Giggle Guts got up reluctantly. "A contrary wind? Well, one that blows in your face. And not on your back."

Everyone laughed.

"Almost right," Misha said approvingly. "A wind that blows straight or almost straight into the prow of the ship is called a contrary or head wind. Sit down."

Giggle Guts sat down looking very pleased with himself.

"And what is a side wind?" Misha looked at the Moshkins.

They stood up and rapped out together:

“A wind that blows directly or almost directly at the side of the boat.”

“Well done,” Misha praised them and looked enquiringly at Mum Trap. “What about a wind that blows directly or almost directly at the stern?”

Mum Trap frowned, picked up a piece of wood and drew the words “stern wind” in the sand.

“Clever lad!” Misha said, pleased.

“No cleverer than me,” Giggle Guts said enviously, complaining to Borka: “His questions are too hard. We haven’t done any geometry yet.”

“Yes, you have,” Misha said sternly, overhearing him. “I hadn’t done any at school. I was taught it at the sports section. I’ll show you again,” he said wearily and began drawing angles with a stick in the sand. “This is a right angle—90 degrees. If we divide it in half we get 45 degrees. And this is about 80 degrees. If a wind is blowing from here at an angle of between 10 to 80 degrees from the stern, we say the boat is close-hauled. See?”

“I see,” Giggle Guts suddenly exclaimed happily, staring at the drawing. “I wish everything at school was explained like that, in the sand and not on the board. I’d be top of the class then!”

The lesson went on.

“Now we’ll do the action of the wind on the sail.” Misha looked into his notebook. “Due to the shape of the sail the boat can move forward even in the most unfavourable wind... The air current affects the sail.”

“Of course. A sail is like a bird’s wing!” Borka said excitedly.

“That’s right,” Misha replied calmly. “But a bird has no underwater section like a boat. So a boat is affected not only by the wind but also by ... what?”

“Water!” the Moshkins shouted in unison.

“When we’ve learnt all about the wind,” Giggle Guts asked timidly, “will that be the lot? Is there anything else to learn?”

“Yes, there is,” said Misha. “We’ll go on to the effect of listing and trimming on sailing the boat. Then to the running rigging of the mainsail, then...”

“Oo, my poor head!” Giggle Guts moaned, cutting him short.

“The suppliers”

They desperately needed more nails and bolts, to say nothing of a mast and a sail. And to get a sail they needed money. You don’t find sails lying around on a rubbish heap.

“So we’ll never sail to Tallinn, even in three years’ time,” Borka thought miserably. He and his pals now knew what the code word SAITOTAL meant. But they preferred the word SAIROWOR—sail round the world. Borka had thought

that one up. He and his pals were still planning to steal the boat, but only when it was fully rigged out. First of all they would learn how to sail it from Misha. Then they would go on their “pretend” voyage round the world. But the fact that the boat was very far from ready annoyed them. The summer would soon be over, before they had carried out their crafty plan.

One day Borka said to Misha:

“You do the repairing, and let us get hold of the materials!”

“Go ahead,” Misha agreed.

So Borka and his pals got on with it. That very day with a large hand-cart borrowed from Borka’s father they set off round the houses.

They stopped by an old man sitting on a bench, and Borka said briskly:

“We’re collecting scrap metal. Got any?”

“Non-ferrous metal,” Giggle Guts added. “Or any other sort.”

The old man trotted into a barn and came back straightaway carrying a battered kettle and a copper tray with holes in it.

“Good lads!” He stroked Mum Trap’s head. Mum Trap nodded.

“Any metal for melting down?” Borka asked a lad by the next house, who immediately produced a sheet of duralumin.

“Any scrap metal for the steel industry?” Borka said to some women in the next yard.

They brought out old pots, pans and saucepans, aluminium wire and some battered bronze taps. A man in a straw hat handed them a huge lump of lead.

“I was going to use it for a sinker, but let industry have it instead.”

Smiling happily, people watched the lads push the heavy cart into the school yard. Walking round the school out of sight, they hurriedly trundled the cart into the next street through another gate.

They stopped at the scrap metal collection point. Borka knocked on the closed window and called loudly:

“Anyone at home in the fairy tower?”

The half-blind man in charge stuck his head out of the window.

“Put it on the scales.”

Giggle Guts winked at his mates and ran along the fence. The man opened the gate. Borka and Mum Trap followed him with the cart.

Borka and Mum Trap weighed their load in portions. It couldn’t all be weighed together, because there was one price for iron, another for copper and another for tin.

The man wrote it all down. Then the boys carried the scrap metal round the corner to the big heap, slid aside a board in the fence and handed it all back to Giggle Guts who took the pots and pans back to the cart.

“What have you got out there? Mineral deposits?” the man asked in surprise, pointing out of the gate.

"Uh-huh," Borka nodded. "Just as much as you."

"Well, why don't you bring it in on the cart?" he asked.

"No need," Boris said, nodding at the busy Giggle Guts. "He's a muscle man." Eventually Giggle Guts got tired, and they decided to stop.

"That's all," said Borka and collected the money.

"Here you are," said the man, adjusting his glasses on a piece of string. "Come any time. Pleased to see you."

"Likewise," Borka said. Giggle Guts smirked, Mum Trap nodded, and they all hurried off.

If the saw-mill watchman had not been dozing in the shade, he would have seen a strange picture. Through a hole in the fence came a hand with a long sharp-pointed hook. Snap! The hook dug into one of the boards piled nearby. The board was pulled to the hole, turned sideways and disappeared through the fence with a faint scraping sound.

In the elder bushes behind the fence Mum Trap and Giggle Guts took the boards which Borka hooked out of the yard and piled them neatly on the cart.

Later something most peculiar happened at the sports stadium.

When the high jumper dug his long fibre glass pole into the sand and ran round the track to limber up, he arrived back at the spot to find the pole gone. In its place was a knotted branch.

Meanwhile Borka, Mum Trap and Giggle Guts were racing away with the pole and the boards along a deserted alley sweltering in the heat.

"What did I say!" Zhenka shouted joyfully at the sight of the boards and pole. "I told you we should let them join our crew. We should have taken them on right from the start!"

"Good lads," Misha exclaimed. He looked suspiciously at the complacent "suppliers". "Where did you get them from?"

"Someone gave them to us," Giggle Guts smirked. "Honest they did!"

"Who?"

"My Dad," said Borka cool as a cucumber, looking daggers at Giggle Guts. "Dad said 'I never begrudge you anything, lad. Ask for what you like!' They heard him, didn't you?" he asked his pals.

"Yes, we heard him," Giggle Guts said. "He yelled at the top of his voice! 'I never begrudge you anything!' he yelled. 'Ask for what you like!' he yelled."

Mum Trap nodded.

"Dad doesn't need the boards. They're no good for parquet!" Borka said. "He needs oak for that."

"All the better for us," Misha replied. "All the boards at the boat 'semetary' are rotten. I went there today." He smiled. "These boards are just the job. We'll make oars out of them."

"Yes," Borka said. "And we bought the pole ... er, mast ... in the sports shop."

"That's right," Giggle Guts chimed in. "At the stadium ... er, near the stadium."

"A mast! That's great!" exclaimed the Moshkin twins.

"And here's some money." Borka showed Misha fifteen roubles. "We took in scrap metal. And we'll take some more. There'll be enough money for a sail! Follow me, lads!" he ordered his pals.

"Where are you going?" Misha shouted after them.

"To get some food for our trial voyage," Borka replied. "The boat will soon be ready now we're in charge of supplies."

"Don't get any boiled sausage," Misha instructed him.

"Any idiot knows that," retorted Borka. "Only smoked!"

"Aren't they fantastic!" Zhenka exclaimed admiringly.

"Sometimes people aren't what they seem to be at first," Misha said. "I read that somewhere."

"That's right," Zhenka agreed. "Take me, for example. I'm not what I seem to be."

"Well, what are you then?" the Moshkins enquired curiously.

"I'm better and cleverer," Zhenka said seriously, after thinking for a bit. Then he repeated: "They're fantastic, almost like me."

At this very moment the "fantastic" Borka and his pals were engaged in procuring food. A jar of jam appeared, dangling on a piece of string, through a cellar grating.

"Our cellar's got plenty of everything!" Borka boasted, putting the jar down carefully in the cart.

It was followed by a whole smoke sausage, a jar of salted cucumbers, a barrel of butter, some dried fish...

"We've got plenty of food in our cellar too," Giggle Guts smirked. "Let's go there."

Mum Trap poked a finger into his chest and nodded.

"Why so much?" exclaimed Misha when he saw the cart piled high with food.

"I'm like Long John Silver," Borka announced proudly. "He was Captain Flint's supplier! Did you see the film *Treasure Island*?"

"It'll go off, that's the trouble," Misha said firmly. "Do you have a cellar?"

"Yes, we've all got ... cellars," confused Borka replied.

"Then store it in four cellars for the time being where it's cool," Misha told them.

So the suppliers had to cart it all back again. No use trying to argue with Misha!

Another sailing lesson: "Navigation"

That evening, when Aunt Klava was watching "Goodnight, Littl'uns" on television, Misha and Zhenka stole quietly out of the house and climbed onto the

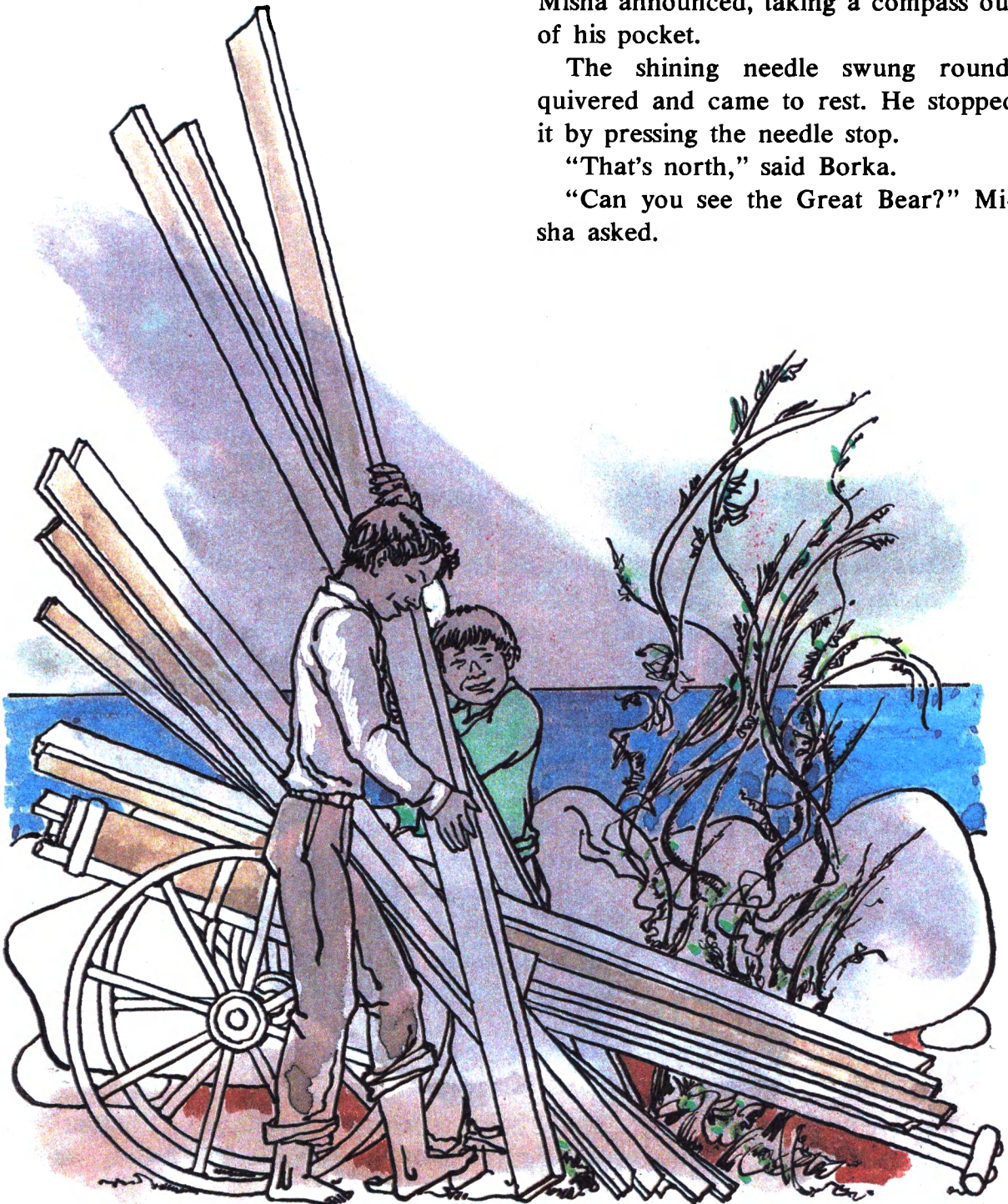
barn roof where the Moshkin twins and Borka plus pals were already waiting for them. Misha and Zhenka sat down beside them.

"Let's study a bit of navigation now," Misha announced, taking a compass out of his pocket.

The shining needle swung round, quivered and came to rest. He stopped it by pressing the needle stop.

"That's north," said Borka.

"Can you see the Great Bear?" Misha asked.



They all craned their necks.

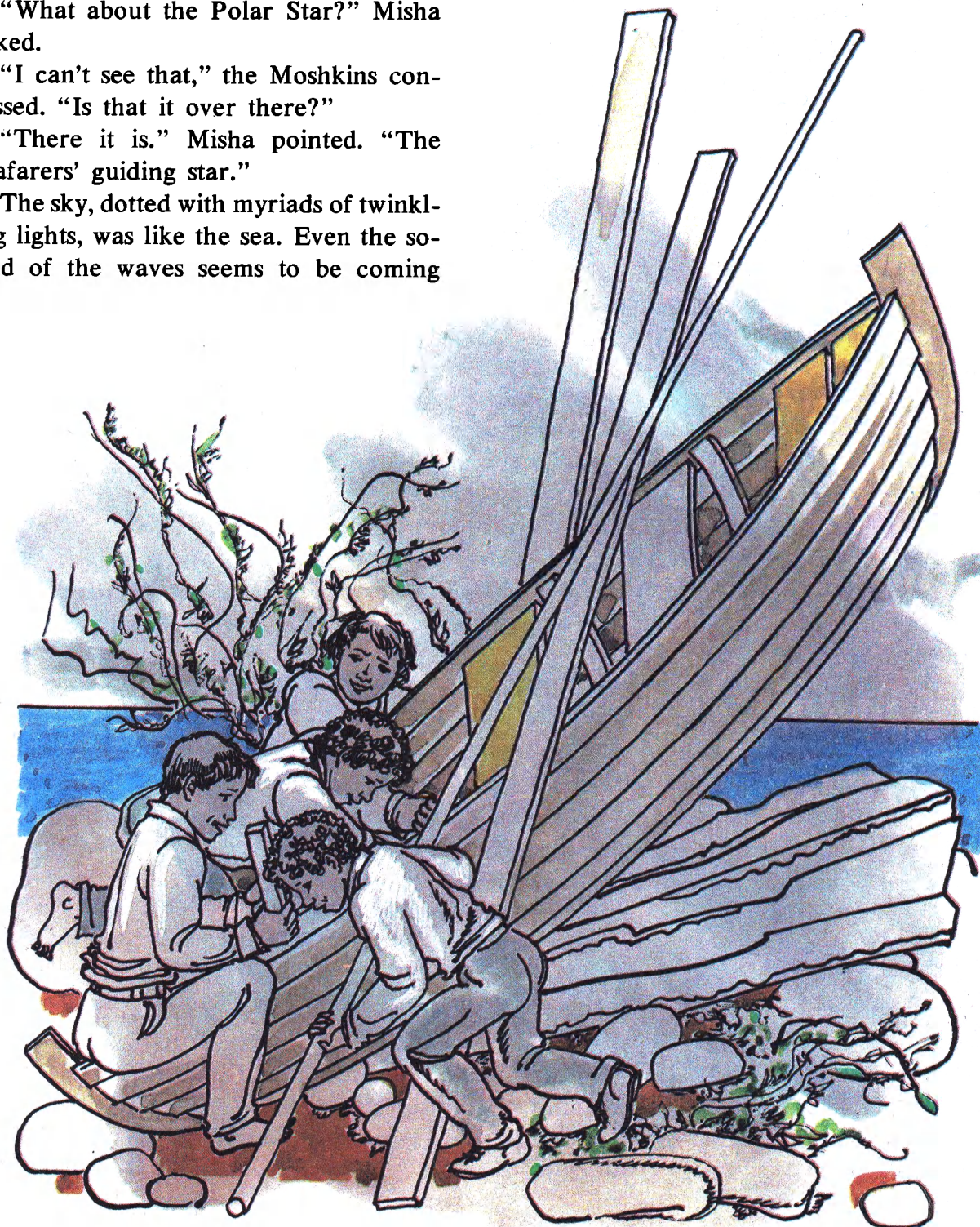
"And the Little Bear," Giggle Guts smirked. Borka dug his elbow into him and he shut up.

"What about the Polar Star?" Misha asked.

"I can't see that," the Moshkins confessed. "Is that it over there?"

"There it is." Misha pointed. "The seafarers' guiding star."

The sky, dotted with myriads of twinkling lights, was like the sea. Even the sound of the waves seems to be coming



not from the real sea, but from these endless heights.

"And there are the Hunting Dogs ... and Cassiopeia ... and Capricorn..."

"Where? Where?" cried Giggie Guts, twisting his neck.

"In order to set a ship's course by the stars..." Misha began.

And the barn sailed along in the darkness like a ship, following the shining needle of the compass.

"Full speed ahead"

Misha hammered a nail into the keel and groped on the sand with his hand. The nails had run out again.

"Where have our 'suppliers' got to?" he asked Zhenka angrily.

"You sent them off for more materials."

"So I did," Misha muttered. "Where are the Moshkins?"

"They went too. You said they could."

"So I did," Misha growled. "They went like a shot. It's getting late."

He took his code flags out of his belt and began waving them furiously, to work off his frustration, so to say.

"What are you doing?" Zhenka asked, mystified.

"Oh, I'm just signalling SOS ... we've run out of nails," Misha replied, sadly.

A small motor-boat cast off from a tug moored out at sea and made for the shore. It sped along quickly and gracefully, foam curving over its prow. Misha and Zhenka watched it admiringly.

"I wish we had one like that," Zhenka whispered to Misha. For some reason the boat seemed to be coming in their direction.

"Who is it?" Misha cupped a hand over his eyes to shade them from the blinding sun.

The boat stopped on the sand. Out sprang the young sailor Nesterchuk from the tugboat of their friend, the captain.

"So it's you again, is it?" he said sternly.

"Yes," the boys replied timidly. "What do you mean ... again?"

"Who signalled SOS?"

"I did," Misha confessed guiltily.

"A SOS is a serious thing," Nesterchuk frowned. "All boats are obliged to turn off course for a signal like that. Don't you know that?"

"Yes, I do," said Misha. "The trouble is we've run out of nails."

"He signalled in desperation, not on purpose," Zhenka stuck up for his friend.

Nesterchuk climbed back into the boat, rummaged in the locker and handed the boys a box wrapped in sailcloth.

"What is it?" Misha gazed at the box in surprise.

"Nails," the sailor replied. "Or perhaps it wasn't your SOS?"

"Oh, yes, it was." Zhenka snatched the heavy box of nails greedily.

"I'm sorry," Misha gave a guilty, happy smile. "I was just signalling ... into the blue."

"There's always someone around," the sailor smiled. He pushed the boat off and jumped into it.

Misha signalled after him. The sailor signalled back without stopping the boat.

"What did you say?" Zhenka asked enviously.

"Thank you."

"Very much?"

"Very, very much."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Full speed ahead?'"

"Show me how."

Misha showed him. And Zhenka signalled to the sailor "Full speed ahead".

When the "suppliers" appeared with the Moshkins, carrying a whole bag full of crooked nails, Zhenka said casually:

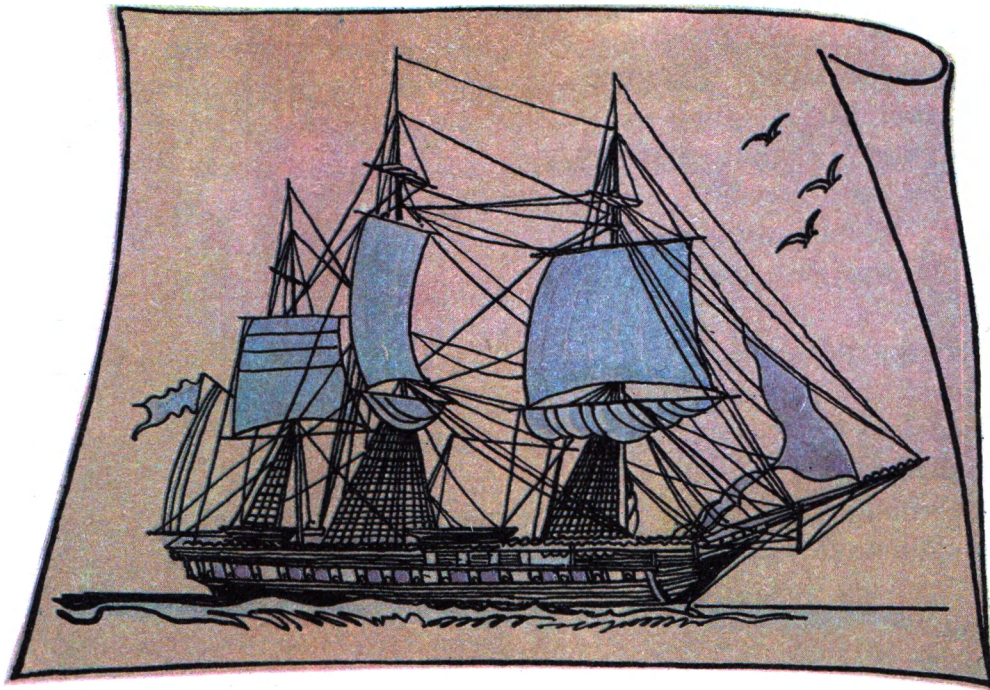
"We've already got some. From the sea."

He nodded at the box of new oiled nails.

"Well, I never!" Borka exclaimed enviously, when he heard about the unintentional SOS and the unexpected present. "All you need to do is signal a hundred times a day! Just signal and get what you want!"

"You mustn't play around with the SOS signal," said Misha sternly, like Nesterchuk the sailor.





“I’m not playing around,” said Borka hastily. “You just teach us how to signal. It’ll come in very handy.”

Giggle Guts interpreted this in his own way and giggled. Mum Trap nodded.

“Very well,” said Misha.

So the Moshkins were sent home straightaway to make code flags. Misha gave them his own to copy from, adding a warning:

“Don’t get them dirty or damage them.”

“Can we go too?” Borka asked. “Or goodness knows what they’ll get up to.”

“Everyone else down to work!” Misha ordered. Borka obediently picked up a hammer.

After lunch the SAITOTAL crew lined up according to age by the boat, holding new flags.

Misha walked along inspecting them. Borka wasn’t holding the flags properly. Misha showed him the right way in silence. Then he stepped back a few paces.

“Let’s begin,” he said loudly, lifting his flags.

“Pay attention!” Borka jogged Giggle Guts, who was gazing at the seagulls. “Learn something useful, stupid!”



Mum Trap talks

The freshly repaired boat was a sight for sore eyes.

"Looks brand new!" the Moshkin twins said.

The mast (fibre-glass pole) rose up proudly.

They had at last managed to buy sails, a foresail and a jib, on the money supplied by Borka and his pals, who had made several more visits to the scrap metal point, tricking the man there as before. The sails were being kept in Zhenka's barn. But for some reason he had brought them today as proudly as if he had procured them himself.

"Look! Look!" he cried, unfurling them. "I've sewn your tiger, er, tiger-skin, right in the middle of the jib!" he said proudly to Mum Trap. "Doesn't it look nice?"

Giggle Guts took one look at the jib with the crucified tiger-skin in the middle and burst out laughing.

"He tried so hard!" the Moshkins said to him angrily.

"Not bad." Borka smirked. "Pretty impressive. A tiger on a sail, eh? Pity the sail's so small," he said. "That was a brilliant idea, Zhenka! It looks very nice." And he stroked the tiger-skin.

Mum Trap nodded.

"Can you eat it?" Zhenka piped up. "If we run out of food at sea, it'll come in handy. Remember they showed Charlie Chaplin in that film *The Gold Rush* on television? He tried to eat a boiled boot, but he couldn't finish it!"

"This is a tiger," Borka remonstrated. "If you boiled its skin for a whole day, you'd have enough bouillon to last a week! Eh, Moshkins?"

"That's right," the Moshkins smiled. "It's not synthetic."

"Get it?" Borka winked at Zhenka.

"Got it!" Zhenka winked back at him.

And the boys burst out laughing.

At this point Misha appeared. He stared disapprovingly at the jib with the tiger-skin.

"Whose idea was that?" he asked sternly.

"Mine!" Zhenka announced proudly. "I got Aunt Klava to teach me how to sew. It took me a whole week. She couldn't think why I wanted to..."

"So you learnt to sew, did you?" Misha asked.

"Yes," said Zhenka happily. "I pricked all my fingers while I was sewing the skin to the sail. I asked Borka and he told me the skin could be eaten. If we suddenly got driven onto a desert island by a storm and our food ran out, we'd have the tiger-skin! I didn't tell anyone I was sewing it on," he boasted. "Were you surprised?"

"I certainly was. Now you can take it off again. We can't furl or unfurl the jib with that skin on it."

"Can't we?" said Zhenka sadly. "I tried so hard!"

"Poor little Zhenka," said Giggle Guts, sarcastically.

Zhenka gave him a dark look, then proceeded just as darkly to undo the tiger-skin.

"Now our last sports test," said Misha. "The look-you-in-the-eye test!"

"What on earth is that?" exclaimed Zhenka in fright.

"The l-o-o-k..." Misha spelt it out for him, then repeated "look-you-in-the-eye". It's not even a test, but ... it's worth trying to learn how to do it. To read other people's thoughts by looking them in the eye. It'll come in very handy on the journey, if we can do that!"

Borka and pals exchanged wary glances.

"I've tried it in school," Misha continued. "You look at someone and you can tell straightaway if they haven't done their homework or are about to play truant and go to the cinema."

"He's right, you know," Giggle Guts said to Borka in a worried whisper. "It's happened to me several times. The teacher looks at me and I sit there calm and collected looking back at him. Then he says: 'So you didn't do your homework again, eh?'"

"Say there's a storm," Misha went on excitedly. "We're hanging on for dear life,

the wind's roaring so loud you can't hear each other speak, and suddenly Zhenka gets swept overboard. He's carried away by a wave and looks at us in despair. He can't say a word, but we can read his thoughts. 'Help! Mum! Save me! Get it?'

"You couldn't guess for toffee!" Zhenka was offended.

"But seriously, say the wheel suddenly jams, you look the helmsman Mum Trap in the eye..." Misha looked at Mum Trap, who quickly avoided his glance. "And you realise that it has to be repaired straightaway. You can even talk to a person with your eyes. Let's have a go. Who wants to be first?"

"I do." Giggle Guts stepped boldly forward.

Misha frowned and stared him straight in the eye.

"Well, what am I thinking?" Giggle Guts asked.

Misha frowned again and said disappointedly:

"Nothing."

"That's right." Giggle Guts was surprised.

Misha wanted to look Borka in the eye, but Borka turned away, pretending to be busy with something else.

Now it was Mum Trap's turn. Misha stared him straight in the eye. Mum Trap stared back entranced at Misha, his eyes as round as saucers.

"What are you hiding?" Misha asked him, jokingly. "I'll guess in a minute, so you'd better own up now."

All of a sudden, as if hypnotised by Misha's piercing stare, Mum Trap actually started talking!

"It's not me... It was Borka's idea to steal your boat! Borka talked us into it," he gabbled quickly, as if afraid of stopping and never talking again. "We were going to sail away ... without you ... not to Tallinn, but round the world... And not really round the world either! We were going to take the boat and ... hide away in a cove, live there, and post letters home at night. Borka's got lots of foreign stamps, so they'd think we were sailing round the world, but we'd just stay in the cove for six months, then sail up to the quay, and swap bits of the boat in return for air-guns, fishing rods, anything we liked."

He stopped.

It was quiet. No one looked at anyone else.

"Go away!" Misha said firmly.

"Do you think you are reading my mind?" said a crushed Borka. "To be honest, we were going to steal the boat! But that was a long time ago! Mum Trap spilt the beans! We did plan to do it. But we changed our minds, see!"

"We'll show them!" said Giggle Guts, servile as ever.

"Shut up!" Borka yelled.

"Traitors!" said Misha quietly.

Borka walked slowly away with Giggle Guts and Mum Trap shuffling along behind him. Giggle Guts cuffed Mum Trap on the back of the neck.

"Big mouth."

Mum Trap stopped, looked sadly after his companions and went off in another direction. Borka walked along, without turning round, and threw pebbles into the breakers.

"Don't worry, Borka," Giggle Guts smirked behind him. "They won't sail anywhere."

"Get lost," Borka shook his fist at him. Giggle Guts jumped out of the way and ran off to the town.

Misha, Zhenka and the Moshkins stood sadly by the boat.

"It was clever of you to find out," Zhenka said to Misha. "We should have tested them a long time ago."

"Oh, I didn't mean to ... I just wanted to have a try," Misha muttered at a loss.

Treachery

"Let them take it away!" Misha was furiously throwing out of the boat everything procured by Borka and his pals: spare boards, shackles, baskets, balls of string and life belts. He also threw out the sails, the mainsail and jib, and even the mast—the fibre-glass pole.

"We don't want the rope either!" he said angrily.

But Zhenka grabbed the coil of rope and sat on it.

"That was bought with our money."

Little did they know that even blacker thunderclouds lay ahead...

Giggle Guts had been busy! First he ran to the stadium, smiled ingratiatingly at the athlete standing miserably with a broken bamboo pole and asked:

"Did you lose something recently?"

"Where is it?" cried the athlete.

"Over there," Giggle Guts pointed. "On the deserted beach. Some boys took your pole to use as a mast."

Then he hurried to the scrap metal collection point and said ingratiatingly to the half-blind man:

"Some boys brought in scrap metal recently. Remember?"

"Can't remember everything, can I?"

"Well, they brought you the same stuff five times. Swindled you."

"Swindled me!" the man howled.

"That's right," said Giggle Guts. "They've bought a sail for their boat with your money. Now they're hiding away on the deserted beach."

Then he sped round to the Moshkins' parents and said to them ingratiatingly:

"They might easily drown, you know. They're so little!"

And to Aunt Klava:

"That Misha of yours is a real trouble-maker! He's trying to get Zhenka to sail round the world with him!"

And to Mum Trap's father:

"I know where your tiger-skin is."

And Borka's father:

"Like to know where your cart's got to? Only don't say I told you. You found out by yourself, okay?" he warned him, as he had all the others.

But Borka's father was not to be put off like that. He grabbed Giggle Guts by the arm and said:

"You show me where. Don't wriggle! I won't let them touch you! The thieving lot! And call your dad too! Come on! Where's that lad of mine? Tell me!"

The first to arrive on the quay was the athlete. He grabbed the mast, his fibre-glass pole, looked daggers at the seafarers, stamped his foot and ran off.

Misha sat on the side of the boat, hanging his head.

The man from the scrap metal point carefully rolled up the sails as compensation for his losses, shook his head, saying, "It's shameful to trick people like that," and trotted off.

"There they are," came the voice of Slavka Giggle Guts. "Over there."

A crowd of parents and relatives appeared. The three fathers were dragging along their three sons: Giggle Guts, Borka and Mum Trap.

"Are you loading already?" asked one of the parents in a frightened voice.

"What if you'd all drowned?" The Moshkins' mother grabbed them.

"I won't drown!" the Moshkins said firmly.

"But what if you had drowned?" she persisted.

"Where's Zhenka?" Aunt Klava asked, anxiously. "Is he alright?"

"Here I am." Zhenka poked his head over the side of the boat.

"I see," she said threateningly, now reassured. "Where were you planning to sail? So you won't tell me, eh? Do you hear me, Misha?" She turned to Giggle Guts.

She turned to Giggle Guts. "Then you tell him where they were planning to sail."

"Tell him, son," his father said.

"To Tallinn," Giggle Guts muttered. "And then round the world!"

Borka glowered at him.

"Well, where were you planning to sail?" Aunt Klava repeated.

"No, round the world is later. Not for a long time," Zhenka said quickly. "First we've got to train, then we're going to the regatta in Tallinn."

"And who thought this up?" Borka's father asked grimly, inspecting his cart carefully.

"I did," Misha replied firmly, raising his head.

"We all did," the Moshkins chimed in, trying to help him. "He only said that because he's the captain. But we all wanted to go there ourselves."

"Be quiet," Aunt Klava said to them sternly. "Listen, Misha, let's try and be sensible about this. Do you promise to forget all about it?"

"No, I can't," Misha replied firmly.

"You can't..." Aunt Klava said sadly. "Then you'll have to pack your things and go home to Moscow."

"That's right," Giggle Guts' father supported her.

"You look after your own," Aunt Klava cut him short. "He's no better!"

"Well, I never!" he retorted angrily. "As a matter of fact my lad's the only honest one of them all. Who told us what was going on? He did!"

"Thieving lot," Borka's father muttered. "Taking all that stuff!"

"It wasn't them," Borka said miserably. "I took it myself. Without anyone asking me. The pole and the boards. And I tricked the scrap metal man. And stole your cart..."

"There you are!" Giggle Guts' father pointed triumphantly at Misha and Borka. "A fine pair they make. And they wanted to get my nice lad mixed up in all that."

But Mum Trap's father suddenly said happily to Misha:

"Thank you very much indeed. My lad's started talking at last. How did you manage it? Shock therapy?"

"I was taken by surprise," said Mum Trap in his deep voice. "Surely it's not that bad to go sailing in a boat, is it, Dad?"

"No, of course not," his father replied. "But..." He glanced at the other parents. "You must obey your elders," he said evasively. "Go and play."

They all set off home. The Moshkins were arguing loudly, the parents were trying to prove something to each other.

Misha, Zhenka and Mum Trap were walking together.

Aunt Klava, clearly aware that the fatal words had been uttered and that there was no use making matters worse, walked a little behind them. She did not want to disturb their farewells.

"Don't worry that we haven't done any training this summer," Zhenka was saying quietly. "We'll catch up when you come next year, won't we?"

"Where can you keep the boat in the winter?" Misha asked suddenly.

"We'll find somewhere!" Mum Trap assured him. "In my yard..."

"Or in mine," Zhenka chimed in. "Or the Moshkins'!"

"It would be better in yours," Mum Trap said. "Your dad's a sea captain. He'll talk everyone round, and they'll let us go."

“We’ll see,” Misha said. “Give the tug captain my sailor’s greetings. He was right ... about everything. Even the things he didn’t say. Only warned us about.”

Misha slowly packed his treasures in his case: the telescope, the compass, the code flags, the books and the map. Zhenka sat on the bed, watching him sadly.

When Misha, Zhenka and Aunt Klava got out of the bus at the airport, they did not notice Borka slip out behind them, his father’s straw hat pulled down over his eyes.

“Don’t be angry with me, Misha,” Aunt Klava was saying guiltily. “I’m just afraid your pranks will get you into trouble. After all, I am responsible for you. You’re still young. But you’re old enough to understand that. Come next year with your mother and father, and you can do what you like then!”

They checked in, with Borka creeping along behind them. What wouldn’t he have given to be able to help Misha. If only he could have swapped clothes with him on they way to the plane. From the back Aunt Klava might not have noticed that it was Borka instead of Misha. The same check shirt, rucksack and suitcase... Only their height was different.

“He’s grown a lot this summer!” she would say, thinking Borka was Misha. In the meantime Misha, with Borka’s straw hat pulled down over his eyes, would be able to slip away from the airfield.

And once Borka was on the plane he would simply slip out of the door in the luggage compartment, the one they were sending suitcases through on a conveyor belt...

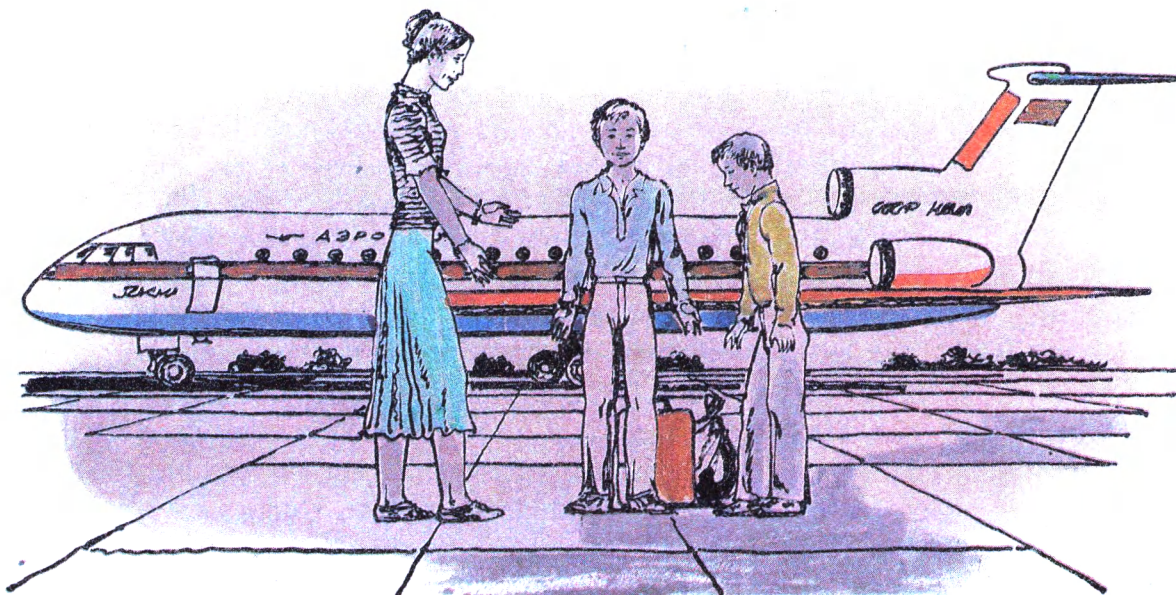
Or what about this? Misha would get onto the plane, then Borka would slip into the luggage compartment and find Misha. While he was taking him to the luggage compartment, the plane would take off. They would fly over the sea. But Borka had two large men’s umbrellas, so they could simply jump out and glide down onto the water! Then the SAITOTAL would pick them up! With Zhenka, Mum Trap and the Moshkin twins on board! They would throw them the life belt! And the huge sails would billow in the wind!

But what was that?

“Attention please. Flight 283 to Moscow is now boarding. Will passengers kindly proceed to the boarding gate.”

It was too late. The passengers were walking over to the waiting plane. Zhenka and Aunt Klava were waving. They caught a glimpse of Misha’s back with his check shirt and green rucksack in the crowd.

The plane’s engines roared as it got up speed and took off, watched by the crowd on the ground.



Aunt Klava wiped away a tear, and then stared in amazement!

She was the first to catch sight of the small, familiar figure with a suitcase and rucksack. Neither Zhenka nor Borka had noticed him yet. She couldn't help smiling.

Misha was walking back to the exit from the airport into the town beyond which lay the sea.

Request to Readers

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